

# ARMISTICE

1918-39

*By*

MICHAEL FOOT



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TO  
MY MOTHER & FATHER

For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.

Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands.

Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.

We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men.

We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment but there is none: for salvation, but it is far from us.

*Isaiah lix, 3-11*



## PREFACE

THIS book seeks to tell the story of the most tragic years in human history. The tale is confined chiefly to Europe. Much of great importance is omitted, many edges are left jagged. It would need an Edward Gibbon to appreciate the scale of the crimes and follies committed in this era; perhaps only a Karl Marx could unravel their causes and make original discoveries. I have therefore attempted to do neither. I have sought rather to give some hint of the terrific force of the hopes and fears which have driven men along their course through these years, to describe the giants and pigmies who have guided them, to peer only occasionally beneath the surface. Some day some one will do the job properly. My only excuse for attempting a task much less ambitious now is the belief that, despite all the horrors of these times, they offer great hope besides. We are too much oppressed by all the mean, hateful, and contemptible things done in the past ten years. We forget the proud hopes and exertions of the ten which followed 1918. Karl Marx said that war is the locomotive of history. So it seemed after the peace-making. Only after years of fine exhilaration were Europe's rulers able to get sufficient control to ditch the engine back in the old 1914 rut. They may not be so fortunate next time.

No attempt is made at impartiality in this book. Unbiased historians are as insufferable as the people who profess no politics. (We know them so well. They are neither Tories, Liberals, nor Socialists, but they intend to vote for Mr Chamberlain and think something should be done about the unemployed, who, of course, positively refuse to work.) Since all the great historians have attacked one another like by-election candidates I hope

to emulate them in their venom, if in nothing else. "I shall cheerfully bear the reproach," said Lord Macaulay, "of having descended beneath the dignity of history." I, in turn, will be content if my partiality is no more obvious than that which the *Times* newspaper reveals anywhere outside the columns devoted to the fat stock prices and the radio programmes.

All this was much better expressed by Colonel Titus in his famous pamphlet, *Killing No Murder*.

It is not my ambition to be in print, when so few spare paper and the press, nor any instigations of private revenge or malice (tho' few that dare be honest now want their causes) that have prevailed with me to make myself the author of a pamphlett. . . . Nor am I ignorant to how little purpose I shall employ that time and pains, which I shall bestow upon this paper. For to think that any reasons and persuasions of mine, or convictions of their own, shall draw men from anything wherein they see profit or security, or to anything wherein they fear loss, or see danger, is to have a better opinion both of myself and them, than either of us both deserve. Besides, the subject itself is of that nature, that I am not only to expect danger from ill men, but censure and disallowance from many that are good; for these opinions only looked upon, not looked into (which all have not eyes for), will appear bloody and cruel. . . . But such a time as this, when God is exercising us with an usual and common calamity, of letting us fall into slavery that used our liberty so ill, . . . indignation makes a man break that silence that prudence would persuade him to use; if not to work upon other men's minds, yet to ease his own.

MICHAEL FOOT

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## CHAPTER I

### LUDENDORFF'S DREAM

If the Urals with their incalculable wealth of raw materials, the rich forests of Siberia, and the unending cornfields of the Ukraine were within the command of Germany under National Socialist leadership the country would swim in fat. We should produce and every single German would have enough to live on.

ADOLF HITLER (September 1936)

ON a November night in 1917 a rickety motor rattled through the dark, forsaken streets of Petrograd on the way to the station. It swung round a corner and pulled up sharp beside the thick figure of a peasant who was shuffling his way through the snow with a heavy bag in his hand.

A head popped out of the window of the car. "Where are you going?" it shouted.

"To the station," replied the peasant.

"Get in—we'll give you a lift."

The occupants of the car welcomed the grey-haired, grey-bearded old man. They showed every sign of friendliness until the car pulled up at the Warsaw station and the peasant spoke with a note of alarm in his voice. "This is not the station I need, comrades," he said. "I want the Nikolaevsky station. I've got to go beyond Moscow."

The spokesman of the motorists adjusted the spectacles on his nose and asked sharply, "What party do you belong to?"

"I'm a social revolutionary, comrades; everybody in our village is a social revolutionary."

"A Left or a Right one?"

The old man was quick. "Left, of course, comrades—the very Leftest."

A feeling of relief was noticeable in the back of the car. "There's no need for you to go to your village. Come with us to Brest-Litovsk and make peace with the

Germans." For a moment the old man demurred, but the sound of a little ready cash jingled in his ear convinced him of his capacity to represent the Soviets of Russia in peace negotiation with the triumphant diplomats and soldiers of the Hohenzollern Empire. The delegation was complete. Already that car carried a soldier, a sailor, a factory worker, together with half a dozen revolutionaries just released from gaol. Only on the way to the station had they discovered that they had no representative of the peasants. Roman Stashkov was ready to oblige his comrades.

This farce was in keeping with what had preceded and what was to follow. In the early hours of the Soviet seizure of power in Petrograd Leon Trotsky had been appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs. He had no particular love for his appointment, for both he and Lenin doubted whether they would be able for long to hold their posts. "I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world," said Trotsky, "and then shut up shop." This was indeed a strange prophecy to make barely a month before he was called upon to play diplomacy on a world stage before gaping peoples in every corner of the globe. The Revolution itself was to depend on his skill in this unaccustomed profession. The Russian army, in Lenin's phrase, was voting for peace with its legs. Nothing stood between the upstart Soviets and the victorious armies of Germany but empty trenches, deserting soldiers, a hungry people broken by war. Peace alone could save Bolshevism, and the Bolsheviks had made the cry of peace one of the chief weapons by which they overthrew the Provisional Government. Kerensky, successor of the Tsar, himself had sought to rally the nation to the call, "I summon you not to a feast, but to death." It was the truest word ever spoken by that impotent representative of bastard liberalism, for a few weeks before his fall a German army had occupied Riga and at any moment Zeppelins might appear over Petrograd. Therefore Trotsky must plead

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for peace before he shut up shop. A decree was issued to the world in the early morning of the Soviet conquest. "The Workers' and Peasants' Government," it ran, "proposes to all belligerent nations and their Governments to commence negotiations for an equitable and democratic peace—a peace without annexations and without indemnities."

It was a voice crying across a wilderness of hate and desolation. Italy was smitten almost to the ground by the weight of war. French and British armies lay bogged in the mud of Flanders, fearful lest they could not withstand another stroke from the German lash. Beneath the seas submarines had imperilled Britain more nearly than she had known since the days of the Armada. Germany herself stood on the precipice of hunger, goaded on to the illusion of victory only by the frenzy of her war lords. On her back she had to carry Austria, an empire for which the War had almost lost any significance; next month's meal was a more immediate problem. All Europe and half Asia was stricken. And now it was to this world that a voice stirred to speak peace from the soul of a nation which had suffered the most racking pain and the most fearful havoc. Such a peace at such an hour would have saved mankind from a last year of war, from twenty years of uneasy armistice, and perhaps from to-day's return to the cataclysm. It would have been a settlement dictated by the peoples, and not the statesmen—a conference in which all knew they were vanquished and none strutted as victors. But it was not to be. None in this outside world knew what was happening inside Petrograd. The Soviet radio boomed out its message "to all." But the language was strange, and of Leon Trotsky, who spoke it, only the police departments in Paris, Madrid, London, and New York could supply any details. The Governments in London and Paris, indeed, liked the language no better when they had time to learn. The Tsar had been their feeble ally; he had gone unwept. Kerensky had been their lickspittle; he

was hailed by Lloyd George as a great liberal statesman. But this new creature spoke a totally unexpected and unwelcome tongue. It was calling across the trenches, over the heads of the statesmen, to the people beyond. Dimly and with an amazing unanimity the leaders of great states began to delineate the features of the same spectre which, according to Karl Marx, in the old days had haunted Pope and Tsar, Guizot and Metternich. Only Berlin saw something different, and the rulers there had particular reasons for their attitude. They had heard the message through the medium of Major-General Max Hoffmann, commander of the German forces on the Eastern Front, who had picked it up on his radio as he sat in the gloomy, cold citadel of Brest-Litovsk. He scarcely knew what to make of the radio appeal, but a few days later it was followed by the arrival of a formal proposal for armistice, signed by the same Leon Trotsky. Immediately Hoffmann telegraphed to General Ludendorff, guiding spirit of the German High Command.

"Is it possible to negotiate with these people?" asked Ludendorff, as if he were a duke wondering about the ethics of borrowing small change from a skivvy.

"Yes, it is possible," was the reply. "Your Excellency needs troops, and this is the easiest way to get them." The duke was more hard up than he had supposed.

That answer settled the issue. The German leaders saw in the Soviet offer not the hope of peace for mankind, but the chance of victory for their arms. General Hoffmann was ordered to give the guests from Petrograd a royal reception when they arrived in Brest-Litovsk. "I shall never forget that first dinner with the Russians," he wrote.

Opposite me sat a worker who was obviously embarrassed by the large quantity of silverware. He tried to catch this and that with various utensils, but he used the fork exclusively for the purpose of cleaning his teeth. Diagonally opposite, next to the Prince Hohenlohe, sat Mme Bitzenko, and next to her a peasant, a thoroughly Russian phenomenon with long grey locks

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and a tremendous, primeval-forest beard. On one occasion the orderly could not refrain from a smile when, asked whether he wanted red wine or white, the peasant inquired which was the stronger, for it was the stronger brand he wanted.

General Hoffmann and the Empire he represented were to have many worse shocks before the farce was finished. Adolf Joffe, leader of the Russians, gave them at one of those early dinners a taste of what was to come. He leaned over to his neighbour, Count Czernin, delegate of the Habsburgs. "Very soon," he said with a chuckle, "I hope we shall be able to make a revolution in your country too." A cold shiver ran down the spine of the kind-hearted Count. He knew that his countrymen would perhaps face stark hunger inside a month. But how did this Jewish ex-gaolbird-at his elbow know it? And what business of his was it, anyhow?

## II

Lenin wanted peace because he could not fight; Ludendorff wanted peace because troops were required in the west. Lenin needed time to consolidate at home; Ludendorff needed time to raid Russia's store of grain. Ludendorff could argue with an army unbeaten in the field; Lenin could argue only with the chance of revolution behind the German lines. It was never an even match, for Lenin needed peace more urgently than Ludendorff, and Lenin's weapon was a figment, while Ludendorff's was tested and triumphant. Only in political genius did Lenin and his lieutenant Trotsky possess the superiority, and it was on this account that they took the initiative. Through the mouths of their delegates they reiterated the demand for a peace without annexations or indemnities, and by this tactic the Germans were cornered. Either they must proclaim their aggressive ambitions before a world assembly, or they must forfeit their conquests and half the benefit of the peace. They saw the trap. They provisionally accepted the Russian



demand, and the delegates returned to their capitals for further orders.

The rulers of Germany met at Kreuznach: Hindenburg, stubborn and unresponsive in his supremacy; Ludendorff, snarling, contemptuous, impatient at the discussion of these matters which he alone was fit to decree; Chancellor Count von Hertling, quiet, white-haired, and utterly subdued; Foreign Secretary Richard von Kühlmann, Catholic, Jesuitical, lover of wine and women, smooth, cool, enlightened, and alone uncowed by these hectoring soldiers; and, last, presiding over all, the Kaiser himself, fitful and nervous, not quite conscious yet that he was the prisoner of his war lords. These together sat to consider the demands of the band of workmen who had usurped the palace of the Tsar.

Ludendorff held the platform. He was not content that the Soviet peace plan should be given even a moment's thought. He needed his soldiers in the west, but he would never barter for them his victories in the east. He wanted the Baltic Provinces for Germany's own, a huge chunk of old Russian Poland, and beyond these vast acres already he was beckoned by the cornfields of the Ukraine. Hertling, Hindenburg, and the Kaiser did not object; only Kühlmann spoke the language of sobriety. His words dispelled with one whiff all this smoke of soldierly eloquence. He did not want Poles as German subjects, and as for the eastern border states, he did not mind hoisting the German flag, but he would never nail it to the mast there. At last he turned on Ludendorff, now spluttering with anger. "Why in particular do you want these territories?" he asks. A slow, guttural excuse was extracted from the war lord. "I need them," he says, "for the manœuvring of my troops in the next war."

This snarl adjourned the conference. It was still unsettled in what garb Germany should appear before the world—in all the nakedness of Ludendorff's ambition or in the deceptive raiment of Kühlmann's diplomacy.

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Meanwhile General Hoffmann spoke to his Kaiser from Brest-Litovsk. He had no objection to conquest if it could be proved profitable, but he too did not believe that Slavs would make good Germans. He presented the Kaiser with a map and a frontier already drawn. The Kaiser was converted, and next day unrolled the map before his war lords, declaring that his previous assent to the Polish acquisition was now withdrawn. "Here, Generals, you will see," he said, "that I have drawn the future boundaries of Poland, those which as Supreme War Lord I regard as desirable, supported in my opinion by a famous expert, General Hoffmann."

Ludendorff's answer was another splutter of rage. He would not be "browbeaten" by the opinion of one of his subordinates. "I refuse to recognize this frontier," he shouted as he stormed out of the room. Hindenburg alone was able to settle the tempest by the simple method of pointing a pistol at his monarch's head. Either the Kaiser would prefer in future the advice of the master Ludendorff to that of the subordinate Hoffmann, or he would lose the services of both his leading war-chiefs. This was nothing less than sheer, ungovernable insolence, but since the Kaiser crumpled beneath the threat all had learned for the last time that two soldiers ruled Germany instead of one king. Hoffmann knew that he must enforce a victor's peace at Brest-Litovsk. Kühlmann was warned that he must walk delicately, although he was ready to defy the new dictatorship. But perhaps most serious of all was the impact of these events on the brain of Ludendorff. He was seized with the dreams of an Alexander; his eye began to roam from the Gulf of Finland to the Caucasus; Russia was reduced in his conception to an impotent vassal; once let him establish his hold in the east, once let him suck the sinews of war from these territories, and all mankind from the steppes of Siberia to the cliffs of Dover would take their orders from Potsdam.

Yet at that moment there were two men preparing to

dispel by their skill this imperial fantasy. Brains like ice and hearts of fire were to be matched against Ludendorff's huge weight of iron. In a dirty, undusted room in the Smolny Institute at Petrograd Lenin and Trotsky sat on plain deal chairs with only a kitchen table between them. They had just received from Hoffmann a document which proved that the German idea of peace without annexations was very different from their own. Their only hope was that some convulsion in Germany itself would shake the weapon from Ludendorff's hand. "This ~~best~~ springs quickly," said Lenin. "We must delay the proceedings at all costs. And in order to delay the proceedings there must be some one to do the delaying. You'll do it, Lev Davidovitch?"

Leon Trotsky agreed. He departed for Brest-Litovsk as if he "was being led to the torture chamber."

### III

The new arrival from Petrograd transformed the aspect of Brest-Litovsk. Already it was a blackened ruin, for the Tsar's soldiers in their retreat a year and a half earlier had set fire to the buildings and left it little more than a stack of smouldering ashes. Then the snow had come. No relief was given to this bleak and inhospitable ruin which epitomized in itself the chaos that war had blazed across Eastern Europe. For the Germans, however, Brest-Litovsk was the symbol of the hides, the fats, the oils, the copper and lead, and above all the wheat on which they relied to succour their war machine. Therefore they had welcomed the first Russian delegation despite their long beards and revolutionary speeches. As a token of what was to come they had sought to instil a little warmth and gaiety into their own shivering frames and down the throats of their guests. Trotsky made an end of all this. He had been described by the American attaché in Petrograd as "a four-kind son of a bitch, but the greatest Jew since Jesús Christ." He was quite

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ready to uphold his reputation. Brest-Litovsk for him was to become a soap-box from which he thumped out his precepts so loud that they could reach down to the dungeons and trenches of Habsburg and Hohenzollern and raise a murmur, a revolt, perhaps a revolution, of response.

The new tactic began with the arrival of Trotsky at the station. German troops were there to greet him, and as the train pulled in a head poked out of the window and a shower of pamphlets deluged the platform. They were thrown by Karl Radek, who now returned as a diplomat to the country from which he had been expelled ~~as~~ a conspirator. Trotsky himself was soon applying the same technique. He made an end of all the junketings between the two delegations, protested to General Hoffmann that he wanted no more compliments, and insisted that the word 'friendship' describing the relations between the two parties should be struck out altogether from the preamble. And when Hoffmann protested in turn against the flood of propaganda that was pouring across the lines he objected that the Bolsheviks would give the same facilities to the Germans among the Russian troops if they thought they had anything to say to which anyone would listen. His fiercest rebuke, however, was reserved for Kühlmann. For Kühlmann's talents he could not withhold respect. He was, wrote Trotsky later,

probably above all the rest of the diplomats whom I met in the years after the War. He impressed me as a man of character, with a practical mind far above the average and with malice enough to cover not only us—here he met his match—but his dear allies as well.

But their first meeting was unfortunate. Trotsky was hanging up his coat in the hall, when he suddenly bumped into Kühlmann. The German greeted him with a patronizing smile, saying how "very pleased" he was that Trotsky had come, since it was better to deal with the master than with his emissary. All Trotsky's hate of the men with whom he had to deal blazed at what he regarded

as an insult to his colleagues. "I felt," he said, "as if I had stepped on something unclean." Thereafter he treated Kühlmann as a snake, which would twist and turn, which he might even charm for a moment, but which he knew always was waiting to inflict a mortal bite.

With this propitious start the delegates got down to business. Kühlmann and Trotsky played the chief rôles, with General Hoffmann in the background boiling hotter every day at the lengthy delays. At his elbow was Count Czernin, the delegate from Austria, eager only for a quick and amicable settlement. Hoffmann feared Ludendorff; Czernin feared hunger. Only a speedy peace could serve their purposes. But neither of them was to have his way, because Kühlmann was afraid to reveal Germany as an open aggressor, while Trotsky was determined to take as long as possible proving that she was nothing less than exactly that. Therefore the impatient Hoffmann and the miserable Czernin had to watch their hopes fading while the two politicians debated. They had ringside seats at an excruciating contest. Their enemy among the combatants was nimble and impudent, but considerably hampered by the fact that his hands were tied behind his back. Their champion had a devastating punch which he sedulously refused to employ. Hoffmann was eager to climb in over the ropes and deliver the knock-out himself. Czernin had not even the strength to do that. He sat disconsolate, and occasionally Kühlmann would come in the intervals between the meetings and give him a dose of cold comfort. "They've no choice as to what sort of sauce they eat," he said, referring to the Bolsheviks. "Just like us," replied Czernin. The mention of food in any form touched his sorest point.

There seemed no end to the agony. Kühlmann knew that the German generals were determined to maintain their hold on the Baltic border provinces, but he himself was resolved that this should only be done under a pretence of self-determination. Soon the conference was bogged in an argument on the precise meaning of this

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elusive word. Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Provinces, and Finland would all express their opinions through their national administrations. These had been appointed by the Germans, but the argument was still possible for the casuist Kühlmann, and a few academic hours of discussion finished with a debate on the exact significance of the Constitution of the United States. Then Kühlmann plunged deeper. Would Trotsky not recognize that the Nizam of Hyderabad, for instance, expressed the will of his people? To this Trotsky flashed back that he didn't suppose the worthy Nizam would stand on his feet for more than twenty-four hours if British troops were cleared from India.

Thus it went on for hours, with Hoffmann fuming. "Give them another touch of the whip," he urged, meaning a little more threat and a little less logic. Poor Count Czernin was even more annoyed. He had not even this weapon of force in the background. All his venom had to be saved for his diary. One night he wrote, "Charlotte Corday said, 'I killed a wild beast, not a man!' These Bolsheviks will disappear again, and—who knows?—perhaps there will yet be a Corday for Trotsky." The same hope was no doubt shared by the whole German delegation, and Trotsky himself had few illusions. One day, after a long debate in which he had seemed to catch the flash of cold steel behind Hoffmann's accents, he stumbled out into the fenced area around the conference building. He peered at a placard which was stuck up by the fence. "Any Russian found here will be shot," it read. Trotsky could scarcely forbear from laughing out loud. Here he was, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies, treating them as if he were a victorious soldier dictating terms to a prostrate Germany.

At last General Hoffmann could stand it no longer. He decided, as Trotsky said, "to put his boot on the table." For several nights he worked preparing a speech, and then one morning appeared carrying a brief-case packed with Russian newspapers. He spoke Russian

well, and in short, fierce sentences sought to cut through the palaver of previous days. What right had the Russians to talk of democracy? From his newspaper cuttings he was able to prove that they had been born and nurtured in terrorism. They denied self-determination to the White Russians and the Ukrainians; they had broken up their Constituent Assembly by force of bayonets; for months they had pillaged and plundered. For this reason "the German High Command must refuse to evacuate Courland, Lithuania, Riga, and the islands off ~~the~~ Gulf of Riga." The Bolsheviks could establish no claim against such a procedure. Theirs was a rule based on force.

Trotsky smiled throughout the diatribe. He saw a full afternoon of argument on a wicket he could not have chosen better himself. He expounded the full theory of Marxism. Any society based on classes was bound to be based on force. The difference was that a capitalist Government used force in defence of property, while a Bolshevik Government used force in defence of the workers. "The thing that surprises and repels the Governments of other countries is that we do not arrest strikers, but capitalists who subject workers to lock-outs; that we do not shoot peasants who demand land, but arrest the landowners and officers who try to shoot the peasants." Thus, says Trotsky, for a few hours the peace conference was transformed into a Marxian propagandist class for beginners. At the end Kühlmann asked whether General Hoffmann had anything to add. "No, no more," was the gruff reply. "A most unfortunate speech," wrote Czernin in his diary.

But Hoffmann's patience was finished. With two strokes he was ready to knock Trotsky off his soap-box. On January 18, 1918, he appeared at the conference and unrolled a map on the table. With his thumb he pointed to the blue line which ran from the Baltic southward towards Brest-Litovsk, marking the German frontier. By it the old Russia would lose all the territory that was

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later established as Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. When Trotsky asked on what principles the line had been drawn the General answered that it was dictated by military considerations. This was the first stroke, but the next was even more shattering. Wandering vaguely about the conference room were the representatives of the Ukrainian Government, known as the Rada. They were the delegates of a party opposed to the Bolsheviks, but Red troops were already at the Government's door, and soon the Soviets would be enthroned in the Ukraine. "I wonder whether the Rada still exists," said the gloomy Czernin, but Hoffmann was not so scrupulous. The signature of these puppets would do for him; he only wanted an excuse for his soldiers to march off and collect the wheat. The play-acting was over. Trotsky asked for a short adjournment, and departed for Petrograd with the map stuffed in his pocket. He knew exactly what had happened. Hoffmann's boot had kicked over the table.

### IV

Back in the Smolny the great argument began. Triumphant imperialist Germany was determined to exact the most crushing terms. The Soviets were to be stripped of all their border states. The full demand must be met, or the German armies would march. No reprieve, no mitigation, was allowed. Ludendorff, with his finger on the trigger, was demanding that the heirs of Peter and Catherine and Nicholas should accept as grovelling an abasement as any great nation had ever been compelled to suffer. How could this ultimatum be answered with the trenches still empty, the soldiers still deserting, and no prospect of aid from the former allies of the Tsar?

In the counsels of the Soviet there was a clamour for war without weapons. Men were seized with romantic notions of the feats which bare fists could perform against splintering metal and blasting guns. Some saw defeat stark before them, yet they spoke of the glory



which brave men gain when they sink beneath mighty odds with their honour untarnished. Others were convinced that if Ludendorff dared to march a Red Germany would come to their rescue. Nothing could still their superb optimism.

Such were the views of the majority, but this road to certain death was blocked by a single man. Lenin was a revolutionary without illusions. He knew the Germans would march. He knew they could take Petrograd with one round of gun-fire. He refused to stake the revolution in Russia on the chance of revolution in Germany. The Soviets had been clutching at this straw throughout the days of Brest-Litovsk. For weeks now the ear of the Smolny had been strained to catch the first hint of tumult in Hamburg and Berlin. Nothing, next to nothing, came. With all the din that they could muster the Soviets had trumpeted their call to comradeship across the frontiers. In return there was scarcely a whisper. Therefore Lenin argued, implored, that they should submit, grovel if need be—and wait for revenge. He was derided for a coward and a traitor.

Trotsky was against him. He had a third plan, based on his own professed commitment to the permanent revolution. "A lasting decisive success is inconceivable for us without a revolution in Europe. A permanent revolution against a permanent slaughter; that is the struggle in which the stake is the future of man." This precept he had laid down months before, and he still believed it was possible that the German troops would not march, that the German people would shake their chains. Therefore he proposed his plan of "No war, no peace." Russia would not accept the peace terms, nor would she continue the war against the conquerors. It was a chance, and Lenin, in order to defeat the party which favoured romantic resistance, was compelled to accept. "We will risk losing Estonia and Livonia for the sake of a good peace with Trotsky," he concluded. "Livonia and Estonia are worth losing." With that,

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Trotsky returned once more to Brest-Litovsk. "If the German imperialists," he cried in one of his great perorations before his departure, "attempt to crush us with their war machine we shall call to our brothers in the west, 'Do you hear?' and they will answer, 'We hear!'"

In this same mood of confidence he rose at the conference table. "We declare," he shouted, "that the conditions as submitted to us by the Governments of Germany and Austria-Hungary are opposed in principle to the interest of all peoples. . . . We cannot place the signature of the Russian Revolution under these conditions which bring with them oppression, misery, hate, to millions of human beings. The Governments of Germany and Austria-Hungary are determined to possess lands and peoples by might. Let them do so openly. We cannot approve violence. We are going out of the war, but we feel ourselves compelled to refuse to sign the treaty." Silence greeted this amazing pronouncement, broken at last only by Hoffmann's explosion. "Unheard of!" he gasped. That was precisely the effect which Trotsky desired. He hoped to stun his enemies and awaken his friends. He hoped at last to batter through the great wall of steel and iron which divided him from his allies among the German people. With his companions he left Brest-Litovsk, joking at the trick they had played on history, wondering how the world would greet so dramatic an exposure of the aims of aggressive Germany. In Petrograd there was similar rejoicing. "The Central Powers," said *Pravda*, "are placed in a quandary. They cannot continue the aggression without revealing their cannibal teeth, dripping with human blood."

Lenin almost alone suffered no illusion. He waited stolidly for the blow to fall, and it came with crashing result, despite the belated telegram with which he sought to accept the German terms. The German armies were marching. One pushed up through the Baltic states on the way to Petrograd. Another broke into the Ukraine, and swung on at the rate of twenty-five miles a day.

Soon another ultimatum followed, far more pitiless and exacting than that which Trotsky had so blithely rejected. Ludendorff seemed determined to grind his heel on the neck of the Soviet Government, and in Petrograd a mighty surge of anger and resentment started in the factories and swept to the doors of the Smolny, demanding that the last drop of red blood should be shed before such dictation was accepted.

At this dark hour Lenin rose to the full height of his revolutionary stature. Trotsky recalls the almost childish enthusiasm which Lenin had shown when the Bolshevik Government passed the seventieth day of their rule, thus exceeding the record of the Paris Commune in 1871. Yet it was this same man, who lacked nothing in romantic ardour, who yet assessed the power of Germany and the weakness of the Soviets with cold, remorseless precision. He would yield nothing to the tempest of rage which stirred in the factories, and found its expression among the speeches of the majority on the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. Brave men might indeed be ready to pile themselves in a great mound of dead and wounded, but that would not avail to save the revolution. Therefore Lenin stood fast against the avalanche. To play for time he was ready to instruct Trotsky to attempt to secure "the assistance of the brigands of French imperialism against the German brigands." But for him this was only a manoeuvre. In his heart he knew that when Ludendorff decreed he must bow.

The final debate took place on the night of the 23rd of February. All day the Central Committee had argued, and at the price of the resignation of four of the leaders Lenin had won the decision. But he still had to face the Petrograd Soviet of the Central Executive Committee and the Congress of the Soviets. Here almost at midnight he mounted the rostrum after many of the bravest of the Soviet leaders had called for revolutionary war. There was a murmur of discontent and cries of "Traitor." Nothing could defeat his purpose. "Let us beware,"

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he cried, "of becoming the slaves of our own phrases. In our day wars are won, not by mere enthusiasm, but by technical superiority. Give me an army of a hundred thousand men, an army which will not tremble before the enemy, and I will not sign this peace. Can you raise an army? Can you give me anything but prattle and the drawing up of pasteboard figures? . . . You must sign this shameful peace in order to save the world revolution, in order to hold fast to its most important, and at present its only, foothold—the Soviet Republic. . . . You think that the path of the proletarian revolution is strewn with roses? That we shall march from victory to victory with waving flags, to the strains of the *Internationale*? Then it would be easy to be a revolutionary! The revolution is not a pleasure trip! The path of revolution leads over thorns and briars. Wade up to the knees in filth, if need be, crawling on our bellies through dirt and dung to communism. Then in this fight we will win."

The crowd was conquered. Still there were a few cries of "Judas!" and "German spy!" but the vote had been gained, and a few days later Soviet delegates at Brest-Litovsk, refusing to talk with their conquerors, put their names to a treaty which they declined to read. It was perhaps the most bitter and humiliating defeat which any nation had been forced to accept since Rome had annihilated Carthage. Yet withal it was a victory for Lenin. Had he not towered over those debates in Petrograd by the most momentous exertion of personality in the history of this century, Bolshevism in Russia for years to come might have left no bigger trace on the affairs of mankind than the heroic episode of the Paris Communards. It might have appeared to us to-day as a meteor which flamed across the heavens leaving nothing behind but a tale of wonder and amazement.

### V

A colossal fee was paid for the salvation of Bolshevism. For by this treaty Ludendorff had gained a place in the

gallery of world conquerors alongside Tamerlane and Genghis Khan. A third of Russia's people were tied to his chariot; a third of her lands were to produce food to fill his granaries; sugar, tobacco, coal, iron, and chemicals were to be garnered in abundance; not a bayonet nor a rifle was to be left in the hands of Soviet soldiers; three hundred millions of gold roubles were to be stolen from the depleted Treasury of the Soviet State; along the coast of the Baltic every port was his; in the waters of the Baltic every island of significance must harbour his ships, refuel their stores, and despatch them to the seas again in search of new prizes.

Such were the terms of the treaty itself, but Ludendorff had no pity for a defeated enemy, no scruple which constrained him to abide by its clauses. The Germans marched on to pillage and empire—across lake and forest in Finland to the precincts of the Arctic; across the Ukraine through snow and ice, ransacking the wheat-fields, whipping the serfs, demanding that millions of hungry men should bend their backs to feed Vienna and Berlin. Kiev fell, a few days later Odessa, and beyond these new horizons beckoned. There were the coals of the Don basin and the oils of the Caucasus; soon German soldiers were dictating that Slavs should go down to the pits and wells to satisfy Ludendorff's cravings. Back in Germany he was distributing thrones; the sceptres of Riga and Helsingfors were bartered to unknown princes. General Hoffmann urged an advance on Moscow; the Kaiser desired to partition the whole heritage of the Tsars; while Ludendorff himself played with a scheme for gaining Japan as an ally by the fresh division of this easy plunder.

These swollen dreams were for the future, but already Ludendorff's armies were establishing their sway from the tip of the inhabitable world to the Gulf of Finland, from the Baltic Provinces to the Pripet Marshes, from here sweeping eastward through yellow fields of corn, extending at last to the coal-seams of the Don, embracing

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the Peninsula of Crimea and the waters of the Black Sea. This was Ludendorff's loot when he stood Emperor for a day. Genghis Khan stretched his domain from the China Seas to the banks of the Dnieper. Tamerlane saw his arms victorious from the Volga to the Persian Gulf and from the Hellespont to the Ganges. Ludendorff must have counted himself no less than these. For in that March of 1918 the British Fifth Army was falling back in the west, and six hundred thousand German troops were trampling eastward uncontested. He was lord from the English Channel, across the Rhine, across the Vistula, to the Caspian. Why should he heed the warning voices that sounded in his ear? Might he not thunder back in the words with which the greatest conqueror of them all lambasted one of his deserting captains. "Go back," he said, "and tell them that you have left Alexander in the conquest of the world."

## VI

Trotsky had shouted "Do you hear?" and no answer came back. But many did hear, and among them were the little bunches of sailors at the German naval base in Kiel who used to come off their ships and hold meetings in the saloons, the naval workshops, and empty railway carriages. Sometimes they would return on board, wait for the dark, and then start a clamour, shouting, "We are hungry, we want food." In the summer of 1917 they had staged a mutiny. It failed, but Admiral Scheer was compelled to make a full report to the German Government. As the months passed, and the diet of the crews consisted often of acorns and turnip-tops, the murmur of discontent grew louder. The meetings on shore grew larger, and at one of them the news came through that a voice from Russia was demanding immediate peace without annexations and indemnities. The sailors raised their hands and voted a resolution of support for the Soviet appeal.

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It was a small response, the kind which prisoners give when they hear a faint cry and answer by tapping their knuckles on the thick walls of their cells. Yet it was from Kiel that one rescue party came to heave over the whole Hohenzollern structure and send General Ludendorff racing for Sweden behind a pair of blue spectacles.

## CHAPTER II

### DEATH OF A HEROINE

WARWICK: I have your word, have I, that nothing remains, not a bone, not a nail, not a hair?

THE EXECUTIONER: Her heart would not burn, my lord: but everything that was left is at the bottom of the river. You have heard the last of her.

WARWICK: The last of her? Hm! I wonder.

G. BERNARD SHAW, *Saint Joan*

GERMANY was thrashed. The last exertion of the greatest military power which the world had ever seen was thrown back from the Marne, where four years earlier the first German dream of European dominion had faded. Bulgaria split from the Central Powers. Ludendorff seemed broken with despair. A Liberal Ministry was installed in office without enthusiasm; it came, as an observer said, like "ration cards, like turnip jam." Sullen, resentful, and dismayed, the old and new rulers of Germany decided to plead for peace. A Note was dispatched to President Wilson proposing settlement on the basis of his Fourteen Points. On the next day, October 4, 1918, the German people awoke to learn the bitter truth which their rulers had so long shielded from them. All the sacrifice, all the agony, had gained nothing. All the endeavour was reduced in one single hour of enlightenment to vanity.

Yet this was not quite the end. The Allies were uncertain how to treat their spoil, and for a moment Ludendorff recovered his nerve. He had a plan to bring his armies back to the German border, to dispatch the German fleet to another Jutland, and by a huge revival of effort to hold out for another winter. The project was not accepted, and Ludendorff himself was compelled to resign. Yet it was still possible to send out the High



Seas Fleet to the Belgian coast for a last desperate exploit. The order was given. And in the final days of October the commander of the S.M.S. *Thuringen*, lying at anchor at Kiel, called his men on deck and addressed them. "We'll fire our two thousand shells to the last one," he cried, "and sink with the flag flying." Stony silence greeted him from the crew, and then the mutter of open mutiny. The commander edged back towards his wireless room, while the men reared barricades on the fore-deck. For many months past a new spirit had been rising among the men of Kiel. They were hungry; they were weary; they had seen their comrades who made protest hauled off to prison sheds along the Wilhelmshaven quaysides; and they were not attracted now by the invitation of suicide in the defence of that same brutal system of discipline which alone had kept them tied to their ships. Guns and torpedo-tubes threatening from near-by vessels at last brought them to submission. They went ashore under escort, while the German fleet made ready to move out to sea. But now it was the turn of the admirals to mutiny. Aboard almost every ship the flame of resentment was spreading. Angry stokers stormed up on deck, having drawn their furnaces. The admirals took counsel together. They decided to return to port, scattering the squadrons to different harbours, but not daring to keep all their men aboard.

On the 3rd of November the sailors poured off their ships into the streets of Kiel. They were joined by their wives, by their children, by thousands of others flocking to the parade-ground. Speakers shouted from every corner, but among the great, surging mass of seamen one cry was foremost. They clamoured for the release of their comrades in prison, the men who had taught them months before that this war would end when the soldiers and sailors of Germany determined to make peace for themselves. In one body they moved off to burst the prison bars. A patrol of sailors stood across their path, firing first above their heads and then straight and deadly

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into the thick wedge of outraged humanity. Eight of their number dropped dead, and many more were wounded, but Kiel was alight. Within a few hours the town was in their hands. Soldiers sent against them laid down their weapons and joined the soviets set up to assume the government. They demanded the release of the prisoners, the removal of the Hohenzollerns, and the recognition of their soviets by the officers of the fleet. Next day red flags sailed at the masts of the Kiel squadron, and the news resounded into every corner of the Hohenzollern Empire. Mutiny had brought revolution. From Kiel it spread to Munich, Hanover, Hamburg, the Rhineland, the Ruhr, and finally Berlin, capital of the proud military despotism which for four years had defied a world in arms.

A forlorn, dejected company celebrated Berlin's hour of release. Workers left their factories, trooping in thousands to the centre of the city. Old men and wounded, women with their children at their sides, soldiers on leave, young boys reprieved, marched together—in silence. No song, scarcely a voice was heard above their steady tramp. They stood, silent still, outside the barracks until the soldiers laid down their weapons and joined the throng. They passed on to the great square before the Imperial Palace, where a red flag fluttered in place of the Imperial Standard. A voice from the imperial balcony broke the quiet brooding over the assembly. The speaker was Karl Liebknecht, hardened leader of the German workers. He had opposed the War. He had founded his Spartacist Union, which kept alive resistance when all other parties had cowered before the war lords. He had paid in prison for his courage. Now at last he saw a new hope. From his station on the balcony he proclaimed the German Socialist Republic.

But Liebknecht was not the ruler of Germany. That heritage was held by the Social Democrats. In 1914 they had rallied to the call of the Fatherland, despite the denunciations of Liebknecht. Through four years they

had obeyed all the orders of the German High Command. Suddenly now, when the Kaiser was racing for the Dutch frontier with a red band sewed on his arm, they found themselves elevated by accident to the responsibilities of government. Friedrich Ebert the saddler, Philipp Scheidemann the tailor, and Gustave Noske the carpenter were the lineal heirs of the Hohenzollern Empire. They wondered how they should deal with this demonstration in the streets, which had now gained the proportions of a general strike. Philipp Scheidemann went off to the Reichstag balcony to proclaim the *bourgeois* republic ten minutes after Liebknecht had made his pronouncement from the Imperial Palace. When he returned to confront his colleague he was rebuked for his daring. "You ought not to have done that!" said Ebert. "It is the business of the National Assembly to decide upon the form of state." But there was really no need for alarm. A little fighting took place in the streets that night. Fifteen people were killed, a small cost to pay for the crash of a dynasty three centuries old. And, for the rest, the German people had not lost their habit of docility. A few hungry bluejackets had installed themselves in charge of the Imperial Palace. They had ready access to the imperial store-rooms and cellars. Yet not one finger was laid on the prize, newspapers were spread to prevent scratching on the polished floors, and sentries were posted to check the first sign of looting. Away at Potsdam the Crown Princess waited in the palace with her children about her. Perhaps she recollected the fate of Marie-Antoinette and the end of the Romanoffs. Her old servant entered the room. She announced that the Revolutionary Soldiers' Council of Potsdam requested an audience with her Imperial Highness. The soldier entered. He clicked his heels. "Your Majesty," he said, "is under protection. Everything is safe. We await your Majesty's orders." Friedrich Ebert determined to guide the revolution in the name of which he ruled with equal deference. But first he must secure peace. He

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accepted Foch's fierce terms of armistice, still hoping that President Wilson would bring some relief for his nation. Then he turned to meet the challenge of troops returning to starving cities, red flags hoisted above so many German towers, soldiers' and sailors' councils usurping power in a hundred townships, the whole wreckage of disillusion and chaos which Ludendorff and the Kaiser had bequeathed to their unhappy successors.

None of these, however, was the chief enemy of Ebert and his colleagues. That claim was reserved for a hunch-back Jewess released from her gaol in Breslau on the same November day that Ebert accepted the dictate of the Allies. She was Rosa Luxemburg, best loved of the leaders of European Socialism, counted as the sole equal of Lenin in argument, and fired with a faith that Germany too could have her armed October. She was born a Pole. She had become a leader of international Socialism among the other outcasts from Germany, Italy, Russia, and Poland around the *café* tables of Zürich. She became a German by marrying an anarchist printer who could give her German nationality at a time when Germany was the land of Socialist opportunity. Throughout all these years before and during the War, in the prisons of the Tsar and the Kaiser, she paid the price of a rebel leader. She was almost a dwarf. She was lame. But on the platform and in private council her incisive speech and burning passion triumphed over all her assortment of deformities. On that November afternoon her shackles slipped from her, and she was swirled from her dark prison cell into a mighty demonstration in the Cathedral Square at Breslau. She was trained and ready for the struggle to win a decisive German revolution.

Stiff days, and perhaps years, of work and organization lay ahead of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and their Spartacist Union, if they were to achieve their goal. Germany had a milder revolutionary tradition than Russia, and the Spartacist Union represented only a small minority. When an All-German Congress of Workers'

and Soldiers' Delegates met in Berlin in December the Social Democrats retained complete control; Rosa and Liebknecht were not even admitted. They called a Spartacist Congress of their own; only a hundred delegates were present. The leaders were in favour of shunning all sporadic revolt until they had instilled their faith among great masses in the workshops and the factories. "The proletarian revolution," said Rosa Luxemburg, "can only develop clearly and soundly if it develops gradually, step by step, on a Golgotha path of our own bitter experiences and through victories and defeats." Her advice was neglected. Her followers were impatient for action. They knew that they commanded much wider support in the Berlin workshops. And when a large group of Independent Socialists split from the Social Democratic Government preparations were made for a revolutionary thrust. Day by day, hour by hour, the temper of Berlin was growing hotter. The people who had suffered hoped for something better than the old appeals for "order and unity" reiterated by Ebert and Noske in the same tone that the Kaiser had employed.

The final moment was fixed for January 6, 1919. Such was Rosa's eloquence and the towering reputation which Liebknecht had gained among his fellows that a great revolutionary army was brought out on to the streets, two hundred thousand strong. The soldiers carried weapons in their hands and bore aloft Red banners. In the Siegesallee Liebknecht addressed a mighty demonstration. "The time for action has come," he shouted. "Let the Socialist Republic be no longer a dream but a reality! To-day begins the Socialist revolution which will spread throughout the whole world." As the demonstration marched they scattered copies of Rosa's manifesto. It boasted of the fear and venom which authority directed towards the Spartacist Union. Thus Rosa:

"Crucify him" call the capitalists, trembling for fear of losing their money-bags. "Crucify him" call the petty *bourgeoisie*, the officers, the anti-Semites, the Press lackeys of the

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capitalist class, trembling for the flesh-pots of capitalist rule. "Crucify him" call men like Scheidemann, who, like Judas Iscariot, have sold the workers to the capitalist class and are trembling for the shekels of their political power. "Crucify him" repeat like an echo the duped, the deceived, the misled elements of the workers and soldiers who do not know they are attacking their own flesh and blood when they attack the Spartacus Union.

Here was certainly the authentic ring of the Marxist call for revolt, but the red dawn never came. Bitterness lay in wait after the night of intoxication. Neither Rosa Luxemburg nor Karl Liebknecht had thought the moment ripe. And, as they feared, their allies among the Independent Socialists proved fickle and vacillating.

For three days of fog and cold the revolutionaries waited for the word to strike while their nervous companions treated with the Government. And in those vital hours the Social Democrats were able to prepare their counterstroke. Whispering in their ears was General von Schleicher, then at his office in the Reichswehr Ministry and already intriguing. Together they perfected their plan for letting loose upon the revolutionary forces Free Corps troops led by ex-officers of the old Army. Out in the streets the revolutionary call came on the evening of the 8th, "To war! Come out of the factories. To the general strike! To arms! On to the streets for the last fight and victory!" Cold and hungry the revolutionaries entered the vain struggle. They captured the newspaper office of *Vorwärts*. The railway-stations were in their hands. But by the 13th the insurrection was crushed and the general strike called off. Terror followed. The bullets did their work. Down had fallen the shattering power of that same German militarism which had kept German Socialism dwarfed for generations and driven the German people into the shambles of war. Gustave Noske, the Socialist Minister of War, was leaving nothing to chance. He ordered a search for the ringleaders.

Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were in hiding

in a friend's home in the western quarters of Berlin. They were tracked down by officers of the Free Corps on the 16th of January. They were to be taken to the Eden Hotel, and Rosa Luxemburg packed her bag. She thought she was going to prison or trial. In an upper room in the Eden Hotel they were cross-examined by three officers. Then Rosa was brought downstairs and led to a waiting car. As she stepped out of the hotel one of her guards bashed the back of her head with the butt of his rifle. She sank to the ground bleeding, when another guard put a revolver to her head and shot out her brains. Tied to a heavy stone, her body was flung into a canal, not to be recovered until two months later. A similar fate overtook Liebknecht. He was riddled with bullets through the head and chest and taken to the zoological gardens—"the corpse of an unknown man." The murderers were arrested and released without trial. An inquiry was promised. It was never made.

Nothing was left of the noblest woman who had served German Socialism but the flaming legacy of conviction which she offered in the words written a few hours before her capture.

The whole road of Socialism is strewn with defeats. And the same road leads step by step to final victory. . . . It is the masses who have made this defeat, one in the chain of historic defeats which are at once the pride and power of the international Socialist movement.

She did not know then the full measure of the loss which her cause was about to suffer. The assassinations of the 16th of January cut a fatal gash into the body of German Socialism. Not even the rising threat of Nazi power in later days was able to heal the wound. German democracy had started its career with the blood on its hands of the two persons who understood most clearly the condition of its survival. It had invoked the aid of the Moloch by which itself was devoured. "The murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg," said Lenin in 1919, "is an event of world historical importance."

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Across half Germany the same revolt reared its head, only to be crushed by the same steel. In Berlin a thousand more went down before Noske's guns in the subsequent March. In the great industrial districts of the Ruhr strikes were broken by blockade and martial law. Blood smirched the pavements of Magdeburg, Brunswick, and Dresden. Kurt Eisner, the revolutionary leader in Munich, was shot; a whole army marched to crush the Bavarian Soviet Republic and drown its memory in a massacre which Berlin could not equal. Then, hobbling on to the stage in the wake of civil war and suppression, came the Weimar Constitution, with Ebert holding one arm and Schleicher the other. From the day of its christening it was a sickly child, with the Reichswehr called in as midwife, but staying to act as an all-powerful godparent. At last on top of all fell Versailles. The victors in their wisdom had decided that Germany must not be allowed to escape without punishment! Her torn land must be carved. Her empty coffers must be looted. Her fallen dignity must be abased. "What hand must not wither," said Philipp Scheidemann, "that lays itself and us in such fetters."

Germany's ally was afflicted by the same horror. Down in Budapest another Red leader released from prison raised the flag of revolt. As Czech and Rumanian armies ravaged the Hungarian countryside seven hundred thousand refugees poured into a capital without food or fuel. By the effort of Bela Kun for four months Red emblems sailed in the spring breeze over the city until Rumanian troops swung up the Danube, expelled the Reds, and dictated who was master in the rump of the ramshackle empire. They acted under the approval of Versailles, but the leaders of the West would have shuddered at the crimes committed in their name.

The agony was not brief. Austro-Hungary paid in rickety children and thousands killed by frost and hunger for the folly of her statesmen in peace and the defeat of her generals in war. Budapest was gripped in the clamp



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of reaction. Vienna barely escaped equal excesses. A soup kitchen in the palace of the Habsburgs and a ring of tariffs round Austria's frontiers, killing her commerce and condemning her to penury, showed that none would be spared lightly in that broad belt of hunger and chaos stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic.

## CHAPTER III

### "THE FOUL BABOONERY OF BOLSHEVISM"

The aid which we can give to these Russian armies—who we do not forget were called into the field originally during the German war to some extent by our inspiration, and who are now engaged in fighting against the foul baboonery of Bolshevism—can be given by arms, munitions, equipment, and technical services raised on a voluntary basis.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL (February 19, 1919)

Even to-day when we are engaged in a bitter fight with Yudenich, the Hireling of England, I demand that you never forget that there are two Englands. . . . The England of labour and the people is with us.

LEON TROTSKY (October 24, 1919)

THE White army of General Yudenich tumbled across the Estonian border on the night of October 11, 1919. This was the kill. Only a hundred miles to Petrograd; between him and his prize nothing but the feeble skeleton of the Seventh Army of the Soviets, broken in morale and depleted in numbers; a British fleet riding in the Baltic, British guns and British tanks, an army of Finland ready to join the plunder; and far away in London Mr Winston Churchill exhorting the British people to implacable hate against "the foul baboonery of Bolshevism." General Yudenich was confident.

It was the zero hour of the revolution. As the German armies of invasion had retreated with the German breakdown in the west others had pounced on the Russian carcase. Seventy-five thousand Poles stood on the western frontier, seventy thousand Rumanians to the south-west, fourteen thousand British troops round Murmansk, thirty-two thousand more at Archangel, French armies at Odessa and Batum; Japan pointing her guns towards Siberia. Yet neither Great Britain nor France was ready to make an open avowal of her aggression. Instead they sustained the armies of the White generals. General

Koltchak came from the east with a mongrel assembly of 90,000 Russians, 6000 British, 7000 Americans, 700 Frenchmen, 2000 Italians, 4000 Serbs, 55,000 Czechs, 10,000 Poles, 4000 Rumanians, and 28,000 Japanese. General Denikin pushed up from the south with British equipment in arms and guns for 250,000 men, and a British Order of the Bath pinned on his breast. Altogether by October 1919 £94,000,000 sterling had been spent by the British taxpayers in this war to make Russia safe from democracy. Now General Yudenich was to give the death-blow. Once before he had assaulted Petrograd, and had been thrown back in utter confusion. But in August a British general had arrived at his headquarters to order his supplies and reconstruct his army. This must be the kill.

In Downing Street there were still some misgivings. Lloyd George was doubtful of the huge expenditure and the immensity of the task. "To attempt military intervention in Russia," he announced to the House of Commons, "would be the greatest act of stupidity that any Government could possibly commit. But then I am asked why do you support Generals Koltchak, Denikin, and Kharkov [which last happened to be the name of a city, not a soldier]?" It was Churchill who supplied the truest answer to that question. He was the friend of the White generals. He was obsessed by the monster of Bolshevism. And he believed that the British people could be whipped again to the passion of war against this new peril. "What if the Opposition newspapers object?" he was asked. "Square or squash!" came the splintering reply.

That night, therefore, when General Yudenich crossed the Estonian frontier Mr Churchill's confidence was rising. Koltchak, despite setbacks, still had the vast wastes of Siberia in his hold. Denikin was within two hundred miles of Moscow with a third of the territory of Russia behind his lines. The nation of the Reds was reduced to a small principality. A leader-writer in *The*

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*Times* gravely concluded that "the Bolshevik Government is nearing its end." A fortnight more and Yudenich would march in triumph to the Winter Palace in Petrograd.

The spires came closer. Within five days he had swept seventy miles of his journey with not a finger raised to stop him, for the Soviet army, such as it was, melted and withdrew. Inside the city something near panic was king, and Yudenich pushed on to victory and massacre. After a ten days' march he stood on a hill outside the city, and could see with his naked eye the gilded dome of St Isaac's Cathedral. Nothing could check him now. He was within gun range of the suburbs. He had tanks, a weapon which the Red troops had never seen before in their lives. He had trained men behind him, and a long, steady line of communications which reached far back to Mr Churchill's office in Whitehall. Petrograd was doomed. That night the Helsinki wireless announced the victory. Next day every bourse in every capital celebrated the name of Yudenich. But that same day reconnaissance brought back strange news to the general. Men and women were pouring out of the gates of Petrograd, picks and shovels over their shoulders; they were digging trenches and fixing the wire. Something had stirred inside the tomb. The city had risen from its grave. A miracle had happened.

Four days after Yudenich crossed the frontier the Polit-bureau of the Bolshevik Party sat in conference in Moscow. Zinoviev, who had been left in charge of Petrograd, sent hair-raising reports of the power of the White army. Lenin feared that the city must be evacuated. He argued with his colleagues. Two opposed him; one was Stalin, the other Trotsky—the most successful United Front in history. Together in twenty-four hours' debate they overbore their leader. "Very well," said Lenin, "let us try." A decree was issued to the Council of Defence "to defend Petrograd to the last ounce of blood, to refuse to yield a foot, and to carry the struggle

into the streets of the city." With that command in his pocket Trotsky left in his train for the stricken outpost of Soviet rule.

He found a city of confusion. Zinoviev, he was told, was panic itself. This man, he knew,

climbed easily to the seventh heaven. But when things took a bad turn he usually stretched himself out on a sofa—literally, not metaphorically—and sighed. . . . It was the seventh heaven or the sofa. This time I found him on the sofa.

Outside in the street things were no better. Faces were rigid with hunger, clothes were in rags, army units were disbanding, spies had crept out of their holes. Yet it was these people, besieged, blockaded, with a defeated army in their midst, who suddenly felt warmed and inspired by a new fire. Guns were placed across every square, houses were fortified, streets barricaded. If Yudenich dared march in he would face a sniper at every window; if he stayed outside he would soon have to meet a people in arms inflamed to defend their freedom. When the last day came the city was ready. Every Red son of Petrograd was flung into that final death grapple; they pitched against British guns and British tanks; their line reeled and swayed for three days of mortal combat, but never broke. Twenty thousand strewn figures had been added to the total of Russian dead. But Yudenich was hurtled back. The winter snows came and Petrograd was still a Red city.

In subsequent weeks each White spear pierced in vain against a new shield: a rabble army of four hundred thousand men, spurred on by Trotsky's wild rhetoric and demon spirit, soldered by Lenin's organizing genius, fighting on sixteen fronts, and incited to battle behind a banner which promised peace, bread, and land. Two and a half years earlier Russian soldiers had been pouring back from the trenches to their homes. Every train was packed to the doors. On trucks, on the roofs, steep piles of aching humanity shivered and clutched their rags about

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hem. Flesh wrapped in sacks was knotted to the tenders, to the buffers, by frost-bitten fingers. At every station the scene was the same; crowds stampeded the coaches, and men fought like tigers for their chance of escape from the cold, bitter agony of war. Yet now this same army, fired by a new leadership and seized with a new ambition, had inflicted defeat on the soldiers of ten nations and all the hosts which the White generals could muster. Europe had seen no parallel since the ragged volunteers of the first French Republic flung back the skilled troops of Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and Romanoff. Goethe has described that scene. He saw the small dark men, the volunteers, haggard and tattered, swinging along the road, laughing and singing, "like men who are hurrying to conquer the world." Such was Trotsky's army. After two years of toil and bloodshed they saw before them the red horizon of victory. Yudenich was gone; Koltchak was executed; Denikin was on the way to London to join some other generals in explaining his defeats. The Soviet Republic was left gasping for breath after so terrific an exertion. Yet the eyes of its leaders were turned towards the future, and Red Russia believed with delirious conviction that to-morrow was a new day.

At this hour a new spectre arose to harass the beleaguered Soviets. It was the national army of Josef Pilsudski.

## II

In Poland there ruled not a democracy, but a man.

ADOLF HITLER

Poland was Pilsudski. He was a figure hewn in one piece from solid granite. There was no mystery about his power over men, none of Lenin's subtlety, little of Trotsky's dazzling eloquence. He was hard, tough, resolute, forbidding. And in place of the revolutionary theory which guided the Bolsheviks he had only a hoard of burning memories which drove him furiously towards his limited goal. These recollections were carved indelibly

on this rugged pillar of stone. They give the clue to the man who made Poland.

The story begins in the year 1873. Poland was in the grip of a foreign tyranny. Ten years earlier her people had rebelled, but the Tsar had wielded the whole might of Russia to mash to pulp the last traces of nationhood. Gallows had been erected in every city square. Thousands had been exiled to Siberia. It was sufficient crime to be a Pole, worse to utter the Polish tongue.

In an old Lithuanian manor-house not far from Vilna a mother sat with her child, a boy barely seven years old. She crossed to the window and drew the curtains. Then she tiptoed out of the room, and returned a few minutes later with a bundle of papers routed out from some corner in the house known to no other member of the family. She waited for the sound of the bell or the footstep on the stair which might announce the arrival of a foreign police spy. There was dead stillness. Quietly the mother read to her son of the glories and hopes of the Poland which the Tsar believed to be murdered. The boy was fascinated by the secret, crumpled papers held in his mother's trembling fingers. Years later he wrote that they "were the graveyard flickerings, casting a timorous and hesitant light on the sad faces of survivors from the general disaster. But grass grows on tombs, new life rises from ashes and seeks sun and liberty."

With this silent fury implanted in his breast, the boy went each day to school. He was forced to listen to a Russian schoolmaster, but nothing could smooth the passion which his mother had instilled. "Helpless fury and shame that I could do nothing to hinder my enemies often stifled me; my cheeks burned that I must suffer in silence his scornful words about Poland, Poles, and their history."

Fourteen years later a thousand miles and half the waste of Siberia divided him from the land he loved. He was one of a band of twenty as brave as himself charged

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with complicity in a plot to murder the Tsar. A rumour flew through the prison that three of their comrades were to be taken to another gaol. They broke the windows and battered through the locks on their cell doors, but the triumph was brief. The soldiers were in charge again, and the prisoners crowded back against the wall. Josef Pilsudski stood in the front row. He saw the lieutenant raise his sword and heard him shout, "At 'em, boys—so they won't forget it!" Four blows from the butt of a rifle felled him to the ground. Blood from his nose and mouth spouted over his clothes. He was dragged back to his cell, and came to consciousness clutching for some weapon to defend himself. He called for a hatchet or a stick. He could feel nothing but the bolster of his prison bunk.

He went to Siberia a boy. He returned after five years of exile a hardened conspirator. He toured the land imperilling his freedom and perhaps his life, watching always for the police spies, making contact with the Polish Socialist Party. He became their leader, and soon all Poland was talking of the flood of pamphlets in the Polish language which poured across every frontier and trickled through each crevice in the Tsarist police system.

The tide of Poland's resistance was rising anew, and just at the turn of the century Josef Pilsudski and his wife, with one comrade to assist them, were locked in a small room on a first floor in a house at Łódź. In one corner was an editor's desk, and in another a sofa filled with paper bought in small packages from merchants in numberless shops in the district. There was a stove in which every scrap of waste could be burnt, and a folding cupboard in which was hidden a printing machine and boxes of type. It had been assembled piece by piece, buried in baskets beneath hay and bedding. Half the police spies in Poland were searching for this one machine. From it there circulated all over the country pamphlets and copies of a newspaper, *The Workman*, which had threaded their way into the factories and even



the homes of peasants. It was setting a nation aflame, yet for months the police could not find a clue. No sound penetrated from that editorial room to the street outside. "The biggest noise," said the editor proudly, "was made in taking a sheet of paper from the pile in order to put it into position. The rustle of paper—our noisiest proceeding!"

Editor, his wife, and his assistant were gathered in this room one February night. The machine was uncovered, and the first page of No. 36 of *The Workman* lay revealed. Suddenly there was a battering in the street below, a race up the stairs, and the gendarmes burst through the door. After a few shouts and a scuffle they turned to gaze in wonder at the little two-foot-high machine which had defied the Tsar of All the Russias. The lieutenant in charge picked up the copy of *The Workman*, and began to read out aloud.

"Orlov, chief of the gendarmes of Nicholas I, was once seeing off a friend who was going abroad, and asked him to do something for him. 'When you're in Nuremberg,' he said, 'go to the statue of Gutenberg, the discoverer of printing, and spit in his face. All evil in the world comes from him.'"

"You and Gutenberg!" smiled the lieutenant, turning on Pilsudski. "Yes, you see, all the evil in the world comes from him."

Some days later Pilsudski was led out from his cell in the Tenth Pavilion prison in Warsaw to be questioned by an officer. He sat down before a table strewn with official documents. The officer went on writing. Pilsudski's eye glanced across the litter in front of him until it fixed on a bright splash of red. It was a copy of a pamphlet called *What the Socialists Want*. This pamphlet was written by a Polish exile in a Swiss mountain village. It had been set up by Polish compositors in London, and Pilsudski himself had stood by the machine. From England it had crossed the seas and penetrated the thick wall which the Tsar had raised against it, perhaps hidden

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in the bosom of some woman conspirator. It was passed on from pocket to pocket. Crumpled pages and greasy thumb-marks gave proof that it had done its work. Now it was here to greet the master revolutionary in the prison of his enemies. A thrilling hour! "Under cover of the darkness of night," writes Pilsudski,

its persecutors, the blue guardians of the Tsar's throne, had fallen upon its last refuge. With a clash of spurs, and to the sound of a language it did not know, it was drawn out of some hiding-place, perhaps mocked in its helplessness. It was cast contemptuously on a table, and, the daughter of freedom, placed next disgusting papers dripping with blood and stinking of gaol, the protocols of tyranny.

Pilsudski was jubilant. His cause was conquering. But the officer too was jubilant, for he believed that they had rooted out the pest now that they had smashed the little printing press. "It won't be easy," he says, "to make another such effort, to organize anything like that again." "Captain," replies Pilsudski with a smile, "I am sure that the next number of *The Workman* is being printed at this moment. Believe me, that represents no difficulty for the Polish Socialist Party." A few days after this conversation another printing press had been assembled in another upper room. No. 36 of *The Workman* would appear after all. Poland was alive.

Down in his cell in the Tenth Pavilion Poland's leader was making a chess-set with matchsticks as chessmen and the back of a Bible as a board. Dreary months dragged on until a note was smuggled in by a friendly warder. He feigned insanity. He was moved to St Petersburg. He escaped in disguise, and at last he was back again in Poland, ready for more desperate adventures.

Soon news that Russia was at war with Japan rumble across to Poland, and gave a new thirst for battle to the little groups of revolutionaries in every Polish city. The time had come to strike. Pilsudski was now importing arms instead of pamphlets. On November 13, 1904, crowds of workmen and students assembled in the

Grzybowski Square in Warsaw. Some of them packed the church, and as the congregation passed out banners suddenly thickened the air. "We will not be the Tsar's soldiers," they shouted. The police hit back. They were answered by a round of revolver shots. Lancers drove in from the near-by courtyards. Eleven people were killed and forty wounded, and within an hour the procession was smashed. Yet all Poland knew that some of her citizens had defied the Tsar and spoken from the housetops the thoughts which each had kept locked in his breast. As the years passed every town in the land learned the power of Pilsudski's militant organization. Now the police spies had no time to think of printing presses. Armed men raided the railways and rifled Russian banks.

The power of the Tsars was tottering. When the Great War came it crashed. Young Poland flocked to Pilsudski's banner, ten thousand strong. They marched in the armies of the Habsburgs and the Hohenzollerns, until the Kaiser realized that he had summoned to his aid a force he could not contain. Ten thousand men in arms maintained Poland's fight even though Germany bartered with her freedom, and thrust her leader in chains in a gaol in Magdeburg. With the coming of the Armistice their persistence was rewarded. A newspaper was brought into the Magdeburg cell on a November afternoon in 1918. On its front page was a picture of Josef Pilsudski, now appointed Polish Minister of War.

[A nation had arisen after a century in the catacombs.] It stood to face a new Europe. It had the blessing of President Wilson, the full and interested support of France, the seal of Versailles, the chance to build a compact state, respected for its history, honoured for its sorrows, living at peace with its neighbours. But the shock of sunlight after darkness was overpowering, and in the events of the subsequent few months the seed was laid of the horror which Poland has suffered to-day.

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### III

Pilsudski rode in triumph through the streets of Warsaw, acclaimed as the hero of this resurrected people. The tribute was just, for this man in thirty years had indeed gathered together all the fragments of Poland and piled them into one edifice of nationhood. But, with all his cunning that amounted to genius, with all his *flair* for conspiracy, his faith was something dwarfed and stunted. He had a mystical belief in the name of Poland. He was too cold and insensitive to understand the needs of the Polish peasant. Around him in Warsaw in 1919 was a ragged, famished multitude. A million Polish children were starving. Typhus was rampant. Pinched faces and shivering bodies cried aloud for peace. At this hour Pilsudski's only thought was plunder: "I am a soldier," he said, "and the soldier's mistress is war."

His eyes turned towards Russia, towards the wheat-fields of the Ukraine, towards the stretch of country northward from Kiev to the Baltic. He saw the Soviet Government hemmed in by sixteen enemies. Every week almost messages reached him from Paris urging him to strike down to the Ukraine, down, if he wished, to the Donetz coal basin, for here there were French troops and French financial interests. Poland and France together might gain half the empire which Ludendorff had lost. Pilsudski was tempted by the offer, but he had shrewdness to match his ambition. He saw General Denikin pushing up from the south. Dimly discernible on this White banner was the demand for a United Russia. Pilsudski knew that no White general enthroned in Moscow would ever cede the rich cornfields. Therefore he would bide his time until Denikin was on the run and the Soviet armies bogged in the south. Meanwhile he nibbled at the borders of Russia, took Vilna from the Lithuanians, repudiated the Polish eastern frontier which Versailles proposed, dallied with the peace offers which bombarded him from Moscow, brandished for the sake of his French allies the sword that he was not yet prepared

to use, and stored up for a few months more his long memory of hate against the nation that had ruled Poland for more than a century.

The hour of loot came in April 1920. His army marched to a tune of conquest without battle over three hundred miles of territory, with the walls of Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, falling to a trumpet-blast. The trick had worked. The Soviets, now just succeeding in driving the remnants of Denikin's armies towards the sea, were caught off their guard. They had to shake themselves anew for another endeavour. The Germans, the British, the French, the Serbs, the Rumanians, the Whites—most of them were gone. Now it was the Poles. Pilsudski himself had returned to celebrate the triumph and sing the *Te Deum* in St Alexander's Church in Warsaw. He left his armies still on the march.

But Soviet retaliation was swift and merciless. By June the Red Army had swung north to meet the new menace. Budenny's lancers—"the proletariat on horse-back"—stabbed at the Polish lines. General Tuckhachevsky, aged twenty-seven, in command of the main Soviet forces, marched in from the east towards Vilna, turning retreat into rout and bringing up his own men at the rate of twenty kilometres a day. The Poles stumbled back towards Warsaw, aching with defeat; the news raced ahead of them. The capital, starving and typhus-ridden, was seized with disorder. And before Russian troops had crossed the Polish frontier a Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary had left hot foot for Paris and London, blazing panic across half the Continent. Who would dare mention the wheatfields now? Warsaw itself was in peril! The Red infidel was beating at the gates of Europe.

Paris was willing, Lloyd George undecided. Already he knew that war against this Red Army was a perilous adventure. He had attempted another policy. He had lifted the blockade against the Bolsheviks, and had even invited one of their representatives to come to London to talk of a trade treaty. Mr Churchill, however, was

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still seeing Red. He had doubted the wisdom of talking with the Soviet emissary, and there was a story told of the perturbation in Whitehall when the Soviet delegate arrived. M. Krassin was in fact a mild-looking little man with a grey moustache, closely trimmed hair, and the air and manner of a university don. Lord Curzon was sent to receive him, while his Cabinet colleagues waited anxiously to learn how the great aristocrat would fare with the Bolshevik rebel. Would the nobleman's charm and civility be lavished on the outcast? "Well," asked Churchill fiercely when Curzon returned, "did you shake hands with the hairy baboon?" •

Lloyd George's antipathies were not so deep-rooted. He had little love for the Poles, who had given him trouble enough at the Peace Conference in Paris. He gave a cold reception to the Polish Premier and his tale of Russian atrocity. "Your army," he said curtly, "is at present on territory which does not appear to be Polish."

Two weeks later the tune had changed. Paris saw the whole structure of Versailles crumbling in ruins. If Germany and Russia secured a common frontier there soon might be a Red state across the Rhine. That, it seemed, would no more suit Lloyd George. He summoned Krassin to Downing Street and was closeted with him for hours. Churchill came to the Premier's door, and a note was handed out to him. "I have told them," it ran, "that if they don't stop their advance in Poland I shall order the British Fleet into the Baltic at once."

For one moment Britain balanced on the brink of a new war. But in that hour democracy across half the Continent awoke from its slumber and dictated peace. Sailors and stevedores in Danzig refused to unload guns for the Poles. Czechs searched the trains that moved across the Polish frontier. In Britain a mighty "Hands off Russia" movement roused the country, and London dockers refused to load the *Jolly George*, bound for a Polish port. Statesmen trembled at this new power which shook its locks with such purpose. Britain was

saved from being plunged into war to rescue the Polish plunderers from their folly.

Far away on the banks of the Vistula the Soviet armies had come within a dozen miles of Warsaw. Tuckhachevsky had marched to the north of the city, and now attempted to swing round it and cut off supplies from the sea. Within sight of the city, too, a small company of Polish Bolsheviks were ready to march in and take over the government of the country. And down to the south another Soviet army was pushing on towards Lensberg. Altogether it had been a spectacular advance, but Tuckhachevsky in his march had thrown all caution to the winds, and the army in the south never came up to aid him. Most important of all, the Poles had failed to rise to the Soviet slogan. The Bolsheviks therefore had to pay for their optimism. Pilsudski had the aid of the French general Weygand, and he was able to take his army out of Warsaw and strike Tuckhachevsky in his flank from the south. The Red army was thrown back with fearful slaughter as quickly as it had come.

Pilsudski had triumphed in a fashion after all, and in the hour of victory he dispatched another army to wrench back the city of Vilna which his delegate at Versailles had surrendered to Lithuania. By his war in the hour of Poland's rebirth he had brought millions of foreigners under Polish rule, established the power of the army in the new state, and left behind deep-rooted animosity between his country and its neighbours. But for him this could not weigh in the scales. He had inflicted revenge on Russia, and announced that the new Poland was to be modelled on its founder's baneful precepts.

Lenin gained a more notable victory from what the outside world could only interpret as defeat. He admitted the political miscalculation which lay at the root of the counter-assault on Poland. Now he clutched at the prospect of peace like a miser with his pearls. Already an assassin's bullet was buried in his neck. He had only three years more to found the Russia of his theory and his dream.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NOSE OF A DICTATOR

A Martial Heroe first, with early care  
Blown, like a Pigmee by the Winds, to war.  
A beardless Chief, a Rebel e'er a Man,  
(So young his hatred to his Prince began).  
Next this (How wildly will Ambition steer !)  
A Vermin wriggling in th' Usurper's ear,  
Bart'ring his venal wit for sums of gold,  
He cast himself into the Saint-like mould;  
Groan'd, sigh'd, and pray'd, while Godliness was gain,  
The lowdest Bag-pipe of the Squeaking train. . . .  
Yet still he found his Fortune at a stay,  
Whole droves of Blockheads choaking up his way;  
They took, but not rewarded, his advice;  
Villain and Wit exact a double price.  
Pow'r was his aym; but, thrown from that pretence,  
The Wretch turned loyal in his own defence,  
And Malice reconciled him to his Prince. . . .  
Behold him, now exalted into trust;  
His Counsels oft convenient, seldom just;  
Ev'n in the most sincere advice he gave  
He had a grudging still to be a Knave.  
The Frauds he learnt in his Fanatique years  
Made him uneasie in his lawfull gears.  
At best as little honest as he cou'd:  
And, like white Witches, mischievously good.  
To his first byass, longingly he leans;  
And *rather* would be great by wicked means.

JOHN DRYDEN, *The Medall*

THE new world dawned in Rome on an early day in January 1919. It was a cold and misty morning, yet long before daylight the city was roused from its slumber by the crashing music of military bands. Flags bedecked the buildings. By ten o'clock there was not a citizen of Rome who had not joined the shouting throng in the streets. Old and young, rich and poor, all engaged in such a day of national thanksgiving as Italy had not known since the triumph of Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour. Just after ten the King and Queen drove in their



carriage to the station. At half-past ten they stood on the platform with all their Ministers gathered about them. Back in the city a hush seemed to fall on the great assembly of onlookers. A single hope possessed this people. Italy was welcoming to Rome her hero of the war, more in thought for the future than in gratitude for the past. The train pulled in. Out of it stepped President Woodrow Wilson, prophet of the new world which five hundred thousand Italians slain on the battlefield had helped to achieve.

Nothing marred the triumphal tour of the next six days. The President's manner was immaculate. "The people of Italy," he said, as the din subsided, "went to war for the same exalted principle of right and justice that moved our own people." "These are not stones," he cried, as the grandeur of Rome was flaunted before him, "not stones, but sacred symbols." Such eloquence deserved its reward. He was elected a citizen of Rome. He was acclaimed as "his Presidential Majesty" and "the President of us all." He was presented with a golden wolf, symbol of all that Rome had bestowed on mankind. What man could resist! Edward Gibbon, "musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter," had been inspired to write the Decline and Fall of the Empire. How much must the Président have been affected amid these same walls when upon him were showered garlands such as only Pompey and Cæsar and Augustus had known!

The conqueror travelled on to Milan. Here another victor's welcome awaited him. The streets were placarded with sentences from his speeches; leaflets containing his Fourteen Points of peace were showered down from the heavens. The crowds shouted, "*Viva Wilson!*" and in response the President stood up in his carriage shouting back, "*Viva l'Italia!*" From that moment Milan was his. A group of wounded soldiers begged admission to his presence. They gave him a memorial in favour of the

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League of Nations, telling him that they "had not fought for victory alone, but to ensure something beyond victory." A leading newspaper in the city, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, hailed him as the "prophet of the peoples." "Italy," it continued, "is Wilsonian to a man; Italy is the least imperialist of the peoples." With those words ringing in his ears the President left for the Peace Conference at Paris. It was no idle tribute, for the article was written by another would-be prophet, a little-known ex-Socialist firebrand called Benito Mussolini. Strangely, his newspaper bore an ensign which the Liberal President could scarcely have approved. On its front page a motto, stolen from Napoleon, was proclaimed. "Revolution," it said, "is an idea which has procured bayonets." Yet none noticed the contradiction—except perhaps the editor himself, who nursed his gospel of violence, but was quite prepared to swim with the Liberal tide. His passions, like those of the Italian people, were the toy of circumstance. If Italy shouted peace and freedom he was ready to place himself at the head of the clamour. His voice made it unanimous.

A bare three months later the bubble burst with a bang. Italy's rejoicing turned to bitterness. In fact her statesmen had not entered the War in the cause of "right and justice" as the *naïve* President supposed. She had deserted her ally Germany for crude territorial gain. By the Treaty of London, signed in 1915, she had been promised the extension of her territory to the Brenner Pass, huge additions of land down the Dalmatian coast, a "just share" from the carcase of Turkey, "compensation" in Africa, together with a few Mediterranean islands thrown in as make-weight. By these means two hundred thousand Austrians in the Tyrol, a million Slavs along the Adriatic coast, Greeks in the Dodecanese islands, to say nothing of Turks and Arabs, were to take their orders from Rome; Italy was to be reconstituted an Empire. This was the treaty which Sir Edward Grey had signed with Italy. It had been a hard bargain. "You

“speak as if you were purchasing our support,” said the Italian Ambassador in London at the time. “Well,” replied Sir Edward’s understudy, “so we are.”

Yet, strangely, the man whom Italy had welcomed as her war hero denied the sanctity of such private compacts. He came as the prophet of open diplomacy and self-determination, but amid the hysteria of victory the contrast went unnoticed. The Italian Premier did raise the matter when the President was received in Rome. Wilson was as much bemused as the Italian people who shouted beneath his balcony. In a moment of aberration he gave away his case by agreeing to the Italian demand for the Tyrol. The rest was passed off as a joke. “I have discussed these matters with Signor Orlando,” he said, “and I told him that I was sorry I could not give Italy New York, which contained more Italians than any other city.”

Thus Wilson went on to Paris, and the Italian revellers back to their homes, each with their illusions intact. Here were difficulties which could not be melted with a phrase and a cheer. Hard statesmanship was needed. If Wilson fought for his ideals and Italy fought for her empire a clash was unavoidable. If Wilson compromised his dream of a liberal peace would perish. If Italy compromised some more solid hope than an imperial fantasy would have to be prepared to assuage the Italian people. In the result neither Wilson nor the Italian politicians gained satisfaction. The President yielded some of his ground, not realizing that only by a consistent application of his principles could he enforce them on the world. Yet not enough was granted to satisfy Italy’s imperialist appetite. Consequently, anger and resentment spread like a prairie fire across the Lombard towns where only three months before President Wilson had toured as a hero. Italy had entered the War against the will of half her people. She was a victor Power without the prizes of victory. No reward had been garnered by so much slaughter other than hunger, disillusion, and hate. Dis-

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content was showing itself by strikes in the factories and demonstration on the streets. Benito Mussolini at his newspaper office in Milan kept his eyes wide open for any chance. He backed the strikes. He said that Italy ("the least imperialist of the peoples") had been cheated of her imperial rights. He denounced Wilson, demanding that he should return the golden wolf which the citizens of Rome had presented to him. And in March he felt the tide flowing strongly enough to take a plunge. He started a Fascist party, recruited almost entirely in those first days from old War volunteers and demobilized officers.

Yet it was not Mussolini who seized the chance of the hour. The man who acted in the name of nationalist Italy was the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio. Like Mussolini, he had championed Italian intervention in the War, and in his country's cause, by some amazing feat, he had fought in the cavalry, the infantry, the navy, and, most spectacular of all, in the air force. His daring flights, an eye lost in battle in the air, a wounded arm—these, together with his poetry and song, stirred the heart of half Italy. In the late summer of 1919 he was approached by some of the army leaders with a plan whereby they hoped to defy Versailles and the decrepit bunch of Liberal politicians who ruled in Rome. Fiume, a port on the Adriatic coast, had been promised to the Yugoslavs, despite the fact that its population was predominantly Italian. Italy, it is true, had agreed to its cession under the Treaty of London, and she could hardly invoke the principle of self-determination while her statesmen were complaining because they were not allowed to swallow a million Slavs. Such fine points of dispute appealed neither to the army leaders nor to the romantic d'Annunzio. He flew to the Adriatic coast, put himself at the head of a few soldiers collected together for him, marched into Fiume, and seized the city. His men paraded the streets and set up an Italian Government. Every day d'Annunzio would mount to his balcony, shake his fist in the face of Paris

and Rome, and announce that at Fiume the new Italy had been born. "We shall establish," he roared in declamation against President Wilson, "the true justice which a cold and foolish man with a hammer borrowed from a former German Chancellor crucified with fourteen nails." Such accents resounded down the whole length of Italy. They reverberated in Milan, where Mussolini was busily engaged making a place for himself on the d'Annunzio wagon. He collected funds for the hungry soldiers of Fiume. "The Government is not in Rome, but in Fiume." "Fiume or death!" With these slogans he pledged his not yet very considerable band of street brawlers to d'Annunzio's cause.

There was another Italy, untouched by the Fiume romantics—the Italy which had opposed the War, hailed President Wilson with genuine fervour, and which sought to extend the benefits of trade unionism and co-operative societies throughout the Italian countryside and cities. Every month now it was growing stronger; hunger and industrial disorganization brought great battalions to its ranks. A few among the leaders of this movement preached Lenin's gospel; others, again, were more Liberal than Socialist; the great mass of workers in the Lombard towns were ready for direct action to assert their rights. Strikes had been frequent in 1919; as winter came they changed in aspect to something more novel and serious. Workers marched to the factories one morning, and ran them as their own concern, while in the countryside peasants seized the land and gave startling evidence of the fact that it was their labour alone which screwed wealth from the soil. The movement gained impetus until at the peak hour of triumph in 1920 six hundred of the country's largest workshops were held in their grip, and the Red flag sailed beside smoking chimneys. At this moment their courage failed. They negotiated for seventy-five long days with the owners, and at last surrendered; from the time of that defeat the fortunes of Italian Socialism faded.

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Benito Mussolini had been watching. He gave support to the strikers in his newspaper, and at the height of the crisis went in his black hat and red necktie to interview one of the trade union leaders. Socialism appeared to be winning, and Mussolini was prepared to offer his aid and even his leadership. But the proposition was rejected. More successful negotiations were conducted with the factory-owners, the bankers, and the landowners. They wanted a weapon to beat the Socialist retreat into a rout. Mussolini's street army could do the job to perfection. They were given money and arms. They rampaged through the cities, burning and wrecking Socialist organizations. They extended their activities to the countryside, where peasant co-operatives had defied sacred rights of property. But all this could be achieved on one condition alone—that neither the police nor the army interfered with the work. That aim was achieved by a compact with "the degenerate Liberal" Government in Rome. Mussolini could secure the connivance of the State machine at the price of the desertion of d'Annunzio. He paid cash down over the counter. In September 1920 a new Liberal Prime Minister, Giolitti, renounced Italy's claim to Dalmatia or Fiume in a treaty with Yugoslavia. Mussolini praised the peaceful settlement in his newspaper. Appeals for aid reached him from Fiume; they got no answer. That Christmas a warship was ordered from Rome up the Adriatic. For four days and four nights Fiume (where the "real Government" existed) was bombarded, until d'Annunzio and his famished legions were compelled to yield their prize of daring. No protest came from *Il Popolo d'Italia*. For his readiness not to embarrass the Ministers in Rome Mussolini and his men had gained a charter to march and plunder, pillage and destroy, in cities where no law was owned which he did not decree. The Government of Italy had made another move—from Fiume to Milan.

Open war had come between Left and Right. Mussolini watched and directed its course in the northern cities.

Money was flowing freely into his coffers from the factory-owners, who had now fully recovered their nerve after their ordeal earlier in the year. Bludgeon, castor oil, gun, and dagger were all wielded to smite back, not revolution (for that had never really threatened), but the reformism of the Socialists, which had cut into the rich men's profits without curtailing their power. Yet as the days passed Mussolini began to realize that the monster he had suckled two years earlier was now growing in a manner which impaired his supreme control. Imitators of the Milanese blackshirts were being formed into bands in other cities and villages, not by his inspiration, but by the effort of local industrialists and landowners. His authority was sometimes questioned. Civil wars raged in many districts where he had given no orders. And, added to this first fact, wages were rising, conditions were improving. If the Liberal Government discovered that it could deal with its economic problems without the aid of the blackshirts to subdue the Left, if the Fascists, despite their growth in size, lost their cohesion, Benito Mussolini might be left out in the cold. He decided if possible to capitalize his assets before they wasted. With that aim he denounced the unruly elements in his party, invoked the need for a "spirit of conciliation," and opened negotiations for a truce with his political opponents. In August 1921 a pact was actually signed by him on behalf of the Fascists with the Socialists. They agreed that each side should refrain from violence against the other. Benito Mussolini, ex-Socialist, ex-warmonger, ex-admirer of President Wilson, ex-supporter of d'Annunzio, ex-firebrand journalist, ex-Napoleon of the thugs, was apparently ready to forget the indiscretions of his youth and settle down to a quiet, constitutional career.

It was not Mussolini who decided that another destiny awaited him. His followers and backers denounced the pact with the Socialists; they branded him as a traitor. His rich backers knew that Social Democracy was not yet smashed; his deluded supporters had cracked so

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many skulls that they would not willingly turn their skill to the Parliamentary game. They compelled him to resign his leadership of the party. He retaliated with all his usual truculence. "I have shown Fascism," he said, "the way to greatness of all sorts by means of the civil truce that the higher forces of the nation and humanity required. And behold, just as in the disputes of the old parties, the heavy artillery of controversy and defamation is aimed at my head, and there is talk of renunciation, capitulation, betrayal, and other regrettable buffoonery. . . . *Can Fascism do without me? Certainly it can, but I can do very well without it.*" Exactly two months after that boast the general crawled back to the head of his troops. Within three months he was shouting more violently than the most violent of his ruffians. Inspired journalism and thunderclap oratory regained for him the place as leader which his shifty opportunism had almost forfeited. This was, perhaps, the only occasion in his amazing career of lucky chances when Mussolini failed to sniff immediately which way the political breeze was blowing. Here, therefore, in the truest sense of the phrase, is the exception which proves the rule. It was his sensitive nose as much as his violent jaw which was to make him the dictator of Italy.

There were no more mistakes after that. The announcement of a policy had almost jeopardized the work of the previous three years. Henceforward he would have no policy. "Our programme is deeds," he said with superb inanity. "Fascism is practical. It has no fundamental doctrines or ultimate aims." Such an avowal must be highly disconcerting to those conservative men of culture in this country, from Mr J. L. Garvin upward, who have liked to detect in Mussolini's doctrines some fine new philosophy modelled in the image of their own. They have extolled the abracadabra of State ideals and soldierly virtues, the mumbo-jumbo of the corporative State, the general hokum of national unity, which Fascism parades. Mussolini himself since his arrival in power has been at



pains to build this legend. In his own autobiography he portrays a man of vision and resolve battling against odds for the achievement of his ideal State in Italy. His own actions in the three years before his enthronement dispel the fantasy. He was the shuttlecock of Italian politics: Socialist one day, anti-Socialist the next; acclaiming President Wilson one month, attacking him the next; aiding d'Annunzio, betraying d'Annunzio; supporting the strikes, denouncing the strikers as Bolsheviks; stealing his Fascist programme of 1919 (now banned in Italy) from the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and accepting his funds from the big industrialists; anti-Pope, pro-Pope; anti-God, pro-God; anti-monarch, pro-monarch; consistently pro-Mussolini, yet ready less than a year before his final move to power to make terms with his opponents and assume the full Parliamentary garb. His one ambition was to rule. Apart from a general preference for ruffianism, his philosophy had no content whatsoever; that was supplied for him by his financial and military backers.

Throughout his seventeen years of government his situation has been the same—buffeted by economic circumstances which he had not the power to control, driven by desperate disease to one desperate expedient after another, switching his foreign policy to extract benefit from the manoeuvres of his more powerful neighbours. He made of opportunism a fine art. Never was he the bold man of iron, marching decisively towards the accomplishment of his mission; that is just a myth of Fascist propaganda. Rather his genius lay in his political athleticism; he could turn somersaults, stand on his head, walk the tightrope, but somehow in any extremity land on his feet. He has been performing this exhibition for seventeen years in the sight of the world. Yet somehow the thicker-skulled of the world's statesmen have never wanted, or had the brains, to discover that all his threatening and bluff had no more solid backing than a bankrupt exchequer and an unreformed Italy.

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Whenever he appeared on the stage in the guise of a professional strong man breaking mock chains and lifting fake weights, some dupe in the audience, usually a British Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary could be relied upon to tremble and withdraw rather than expose the fraud. There is nothing new in the technique of heroics performed by a master opportunist. It is not a weapon which the dictator of Italy has suddenly drawn from its scabbard in the past five years. For precisely this method was employed in the first great martial feat of Italian Fascism—the march on Rome.

The plan of campaign was laid at a meeting of the Fascist party on October 16, 1922. It was decided then to stage a demonstration with the aim of forcing the King to appoint a Fascist Ministry. Mussolini's military advisers knew that any revolt could be easily crushed if the forces of the State were wielded against them. That point, however, was irrelevant, for many of the regular Army leaders had already guaranteed their support, and, indeed, they may even have suggested the plan. On the other hand, it was essential that the Fascists should wait no longer. Conditions in the country generally were improving, and without the control of the State machine it was highly unlikely that Fascism could increase its strength among the people, or even hold such support as it had already won. Half the Army was Mussolini's; the landowners and industrialists were with him; in every city he had his own private militia; his opponents were divided and disorganized, already disillusioned by their defeat two years earlier. The only doubts concerned the attitude of the King and those Generals who still respected their oath of allegiance. Bravely Mussolini decided that the forces at his back justified him in delivering the challenge. On the 24th of October he attended the party congress at Naples. "I take a solemn oath," he shouted, "that either the government of the country must be given peacefully to the Fascisti, or we will take it by force." The words were greeted with shouts of

"To Rome, to Rome!" With that aim pronounced openly to the world, with no apparent effort made by the State to forestall it, Mussolini returned to Milan to continue the thunder from his newspaper office.

Rome held the key to Fascist triumph or fiasco. The Prime Minister considered the proclamation of martial law, but the King hesitated. "Five minutes of fire," said General Badoglio, "and Fascism will collapse." The King hesitated while a scornful reply came back from Milan. "We do not believe," said *Il Popolo d'Italia*,

that General Badoglio's gloomy expectations will be fulfilled. The national Army will not march against the army of the blackshirts, for the simple reasons that the Fascists will never march against the national army, for whom they have the highest respect and an infinite admiration.

That was the secret of the whole affair. All Italy knew that a march was being prepared; all Italy knew that nothing was being done to stop it. On the 27th of October the final order came. Forty thousand blackshirts converged towards an appointed place outside Rome. They carried some rifles and revolvers, but no machine-guns and little ammunition. No matter. A few umbrellas would have been more useful than all their powder, for the worst enemy they had to fight was the rain. It came down in torrents, and one batch of the soldiers of the new Italy wanted to move into shelters in Rome for fear of pneumonia. Yet in the end Fascist courage surmounted the ordeal. They stood for hours in the mud, while inside Rome itself big business, landlordism, and, most decisive, the Army whispered in the ear of King Victor Emmanuel their hatred of the Left and their call for "order." They argued, cajoled, and threatened. And on the 29th of October, when they told him that the Army chief, the Duke of Aosta, was outside Rome with eighty thousand men, ready to seize the crown if need be, the King yielded.

A telephone call was put through to the newspaper

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office in Milan. The line was bad. Outside in the streets a few boards were being slung into a barricade. Mussolini demanded official confirmation by telegram. Only a few more moments of doubt and wonder. Then came the official invitation requesting the Fascist boss to become Prime Minister of Italy. He waited a few hours longer, time to dispatch orders for the grand offensive to all his street armies, time to send up in flames the Socialist newspaper office where he had worked as editor before the War. With that matter settled, he stepped into his sleeping-car. Some miles outside Rome he put on his black shirt. One stop was allowed—to proclaim victory to his shivering, rain-soaked legions on the outskirts. Then on to the Quirinal, still in his black shirt. "I beg your Majesty to forgive me," he said, bowing low and kissing the royal hand. Next day King and Premier reviewed twenty thousand Fascisti in the streets of Rome. Amid cheers and shouting and a little killing in the back alleys Italy celebrated the greatest feat of military skill and daring since Joshua captured Jericho with a round of trumpet-blasts.

Europe failed to detect the significance of the new authority which had kicked aside the corpse of Italian democracy. But all were interested in the new Prime Minister. The *Times* described him as "Napoleon turned pugilist," and prophesied that his jaw would become famous. He paid a visit to England. He was received at the Savoy. Bonar Law and his faithful shadow Beaverbrook were there. But the guests tumbled past the old British Premier to catch a glimpse of the new Italian Premier. London's Society pushed and gaped and sniggered. Bonar Law stood back from the rush. "A lunatic," was his judgment.

Yet a year after the march to Rome, when Italian shells bombarded the island of Corfu to teach the Greeks a lesson, Europe rubbed its eyes and began to realize that a new and ruffian force had been installed in power in Italy. It was the first bullying escapade of a series by

which Italian Fascism sought escape from its perpetual dilemma. "What is the chief problem of Fascism to-day?" some one asked the new Prime Minister. "Its duration," he replied.

## II

A few months after Mussolini's shells had raked the undefended island of Corfu Italy's first hero of the War died in his sleep, a broken and forgotten man. All the ideals which he had espoused were dissipated. The cheering of the crowds in Rome had changed to curses. Hopes which the name of Wilson had aroused across all Europe had been utterly destroyed.

It was in Rome that he made the first compromise which robbed him of the power to impose his authority on the other great nations engaged in the business of peace-making. His readiness to agree to Italy's occupation of the Austrian Tyrol drove the first breach through his Liberal ramparts. Through that same hole poured all the ugly passions which the War had aroused, and which succeeded in reducing the ideal of a Liberal peace to a business of common barter. The President's accents were lost amid the general clamour for revenge, the persistent holler for a vindictive peace shrieked daily from such newspapers as the *London Times*, the continuous squawking that the terms negotiated by the statesmen at Versailles were not sufficiently harsh, a view represented best in the telegram sent in protest to Lloyd George at one of the critical moments in the conference signed by two hundred Conservative Members of Parliament (among them Sir Samuel Hoare and Lord Halifax). In the result of the twenty-three principles which the President had outlined for a "peace without victors" only four were enshrined in the final treaty. Versailles certainly had the merit that it reduced the numbers of people in Europe compelled to live under alien rule from one hundred millions to thirty millions. But that was not sufficient. The future peace of Europe required that there should

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be no conquerors and no conquered. Instead, the peace-makers sought to punish those who had already been sufficiently punished by hunger, ruin, and death in their midst. The best epitaph on Versailles and the cruellest exposure of the fickleness of the President's Liberalism confronted by a world that he did not understand was written by perhaps the greatest master of English prose in this epoch. These are the words of T. E. Lawrence:

We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves any good or evil; yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out and took from us our victory, and remade it in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not yet learned to keep, and was pitifully weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace. When we are their age we shall no doubt serve our children so.

The thirst for empire and dominion, for hegemony in Europe and profit in Africa, had dispelled the hope of that "new commonwealth in which the dominant races will forget their brute achievements and white and red and yellow and brown and black will stand up together without side-glances in the service of the world."

## CHAPTER V

### KEMAL THE GREAT

Vote it as you please. There is a company of poor men who will shed their last drop of blood, before they see it settled so.

OLIVER CROMWELL

**H**UNGER, disillusion, revenge, and proud hope were forging a new Europe. Asia was seared by the same flame. The great Ottoman Empire had broken to splinters with an even louder crash than that of the Habsburgs and the Hohenzollerns. The Turkish Army had been scattered, and the Turkish peasant without government or direction sought to scrape from the soil to-morrow's meal. For any conquering nation, greedy for its slice of spoil, here was an easy prize.

Working ceaselessly in the corridors of Versailles with his dream of a Greek empire on the Turkish mainland was the towering statesman of the Levant, M. Venizelos, Prime Minister of Greece. In the dark days of the War, when the Greek King Constantine intrigued with the Germans, this man held fast to his faith in English victory. His country had suffered under the Turks. He had the right now to his reward. And he made his bargain with Mr Lloyd George.

Constantinople lived under the eye of the foreigner and in the shadow of his guns. It was a nest of espionage. Spies speaking every tongue parleyed and waited for the dictate from Versailles. Soldiers in British, French, and Italian uniforms bumped into one another in the streets. British officers had turned policemen. They groped through the back alleys of the city, banging at the doors and carrying in their hands an arrest warrant. They were told to seize the young Turkish general, Mustapha Kemal, who had fought the British in the

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Dardanelles and in Palestine. They had orders to pack him off to Malta.

One man nobody noticed. He was the gibbering Sultan, head of the Turkish Government. He just did what he was told. On Friday he rode in solitary splendour to offer his prayers to Allah and Mohammed at the mosque. No Turk followed his chariot. Only a few curious foreigners gazed on the pilgrimage. He was the Great Nobody. He had lost the last shred of esteem from his countrymen by dealing with the foreigner. And at the bridgeheads, in the museums, and round the conspirator's table where the sons of Turkey gathered prayers were offered for the resurgence of Turkish arms. They whispered one question: *What was Kemal doing?*

In the Sultan's palace, it was abject surrender, but in the back streets of the capital a dozen secret societies were formed with the aim of stealing guns from the enemy's depots and smuggling them into the interior. Kemal was sympathetic, yet he had no intention of falling into the hands of the British. As a youth he had escaped from the Red prison of Stamboul, in which men as tough as he had been killed without a trace. He had eluded the snares of the old Sultan, Abdul the Damned. British bullets had grazed his arm at Gallipoli, and in Palestine he had slipped through Allenby's fingers. To-day again luck was on his side. Resistance was rising on the Asiatic mainland, in Anatolia, organized partly by some old members of the Committee of Union and Progress, which had expelled Abdul and made the revolution of the Young Turks before the War. Now Abdul's block-headed successor, maintained by the British and recalling Kemal's old hatred and contempt for the Committee's leaders, thought for one fatal moment that Kemal was the man to execute the suppression in Anatolia. He gave the order for his appointment as Inspector-General of the East.

Kemal was exultant. In Constantinople he was stifled and choked by the pressure of foreign arms. In the



interior he would taste the free air where Turks could think and act for themselves. As he packed his bag news was brought to him that invading Greek troops had landed at Smyrna. He must act quickly. He set sail for the Black Sea port of Samsun. The Sultan soon repented of his folly, but when his agents arrived at Kemal's house the bird had flown. Had they arrived a few hours earlier Kemal might have finished his days in the prison camp in Malta. Europe would never have learned, and Turkey would never have loved, the name of Atatürk. The ship that took him through the storms of the Black Sea bore a hardly less momentous cargo than the frigate which carried Napoleon back from his Egyptian fiasco to the throne of the French Empire.

Out in the wilds there was no time to be lost. Kemal called together the guerrilla leaders who had behind them skeleton armies, still bleeding from wounds suffered in the Syrian war. They decided to call a congress of delegates representing all Turkey. Kemal himself toured the countryside, organizing, arguing, rousing the people to fresh endeavour. The news sent a shiver of fright through the Sultan in Constantinople. He demanded Kemal's return. "I will stay in Anatolia," came the reply, "until the nation has won its independence." He kept his word.

Some in disguise, many secretly over high mountain passes, Kemal himself narrowly escaping arrest by the Sultan's agents, the delegates assembled in conference. The spirit of national resistance was sharpened as delegates from the four corners of Turkey met and discovered they were not alone in their hatred of the foreigner. Angora, a fine natural fortress in the centre of Anatolia, was selected as the seat of the new Government. It was a capital built on a rock, unassailable from the broad plain below. From here was issued the "National Pact," proclaiming the intention of the new Turkey to drive the Greeks and their foreign backers into the sea. Such was the Turkish Declaration of Independence, and Kemal

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was their Thomas Jefferson and George Washington rolled into one.

The Sultan capitulated. He showed himself ready to accept the Nationalists' policy of opposition to the foreigner. Amid shouts of triumph the Assembly moved back to the old capital, and with supreme insolence reaffirmed the National Pact while British warships still lay in the Bosphorus. Magnificent, but not national rebellion! General Milne, in command of the British soldiers, marched into Constantinople and occupied the city. Forty of the Turkish ringleaders were deported to Malta, and the soldiers went off once more in search of Kemal.

It was a vain hunt, for he was still in Angora. He had sneered at the delegates as they trooped off to Constantinople. These amateurs supposed that the ring of foreign armies surrounding the country would be pierced by a few resounding declarations. Kemal knew better. He was still organizing against the peril of invasion. The Sultan, the Greeks, the French to the south, and the British in the Bosphorus all threatened, and Italy too wanted her cut. The Allies had made public the Treaty of Sèvres, by which they had agreed to carve up the country between themselves and their puppets. It was Turkey's death sentence. But by Kemal's ferocious will even before the Allied judges put on their black caps the prisoner was loosening his chains. A new nation was to be forged by the valour of her people, the military genius of one man—and, away in Greece, by the bad temper of one monkey.

## II

Venizelos had returned to Athens from Paris in September 1920. By his diplomacy Greece had been exalted to a pinnacle from which she gazed on a grandiose future. Then Greek tragedy intervened.

King Alexander had been raised to the throne when his father, the pro-German Constantine, had been driven

into exile. The new King backed Venizelos. On an October afternoon he walked with his spaniel to watch the monkeys play in the palace gardens. The King toyed with a monkey. The monkey bit the King. He died from the bite in fearful agony, and half the Greek dream of empire died with him. Constantine was on the way back, and Greece was thrown into a general election. Venizelos thought himself safe, but strange defeat at the polls brought him plunging down from his eminence. Within a few days he was stealing out of Greece under the cover of night, forced to seek refuge on a British gunboat. Greece's old statesman had gone; her old King was back. He arrived at the port of Piræus amid scenes of enthusiasm and joy seldom witnessed in the annals of democracy. Riotous shouting heralded him to Athens. But away on the Asiatic mainland a Greek army was left fighting, with all France and half Britain eager to withdraw from an adventure in association with a pro-German king. Only a few weeks later a French emissary was off to treat with Kemal.

Still, for a few months the Greeks swept on. An avalanche of fire bore them forward, leaving in its wake a flame of anger which scorched the whole countryside. Often barefooted and without uniforms, the Turks rallied to Kemal's standard. Fresh deputies assembled at Angora, and Kemal was elected President of the Grand National Assembly. Yet he had only twenty-five thousand men against the Greeks' eighty thousand, and in the face of their onslaught he was compelled to fall back. Right up till July 1921 the retreat continued, until on the 14th of August the two armies confronted each other across the river Sakaria, just before Angora itself.

It was the last ditch of defiance. Behind the Greeks were months of triumphant war, big supplies and munitions, British warships at the base, and far away in London a British Prime Minister who had nailed his political fortune to their cause. Behind the Turks were the rock capital with its squalid mud-hut houses, an unknown

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city-to-be, and in a near-by village shed a little-known leader with the Sultan's price on his head, a wound in his ribs, and a grey cloak slung round his shoulder. Fourteen days the battle swayed. For a moment it seemed that the Greeks would win through to dictate peace and conquest in Angora itself. But Kemal stuck fast; the aching rib, all the thrusting power of Greece, could not daunt his faith. All the schemes plotted in the conference room at Versailles, the huge sums spent on warships to tower over Constantinople and equip the Greeks, the plan of dismemberment so confidently approved round a table at Sèvres, the misguided daring of Lloyd George, the unlucky dreams of M. Venizelos, were set at naught by the strategy of this man in the grey cloak and his followers who fought for their homesteads. They were the victors. Now for revenge. A single sentence became the Turk Army order of the day. "Soldiers, forward! Direction, the Mediterranean!"

The Greeks tumbled back in chaos. Soon they were chasing for the sea. Some threw away their arms and begged for mercy from the conquerors. Others reached the Mediterranean and scrambled into open boats and rafts without food or water. A few were towed safe into Piræus to find a Government, fearful of revolution, stripping them of their arms and packing them off to their homes.

Kemal rode as saviour through the cobbled streets of Smyrna. And as the cheering Turks gave him welcome flames in the European quarter of the city proclaimed that the authority of the foreigner was to be burnt out of the new Turkey for ever. Some, indeed, still mistook the sign. Here a defeated nation had shown itself within four years exultant and conquering. A rude blow for the *Versaillistes*! And when the Turks drove into Europe Lloyd George seemed ready to throw them back. But Bonar Law intervened decisively with his phrase, "We cannot police the world alone." The *Daily Express* led a campaign against "a new foreign war." Turkey

had established her claim to nationhood by the sword, and the people of the West, if not their statesmen, were in no mood to challenge her right. A small nation by its own hand alone had won a triumph greater than any secured in the War fought in their name.

Back in Greece Constantine was taking the road on his travels again. The cheering, happy multitude on the quayside at Piræus only a year before had changed to an angry mob demanding swift retribution on those who had contrived the fearful crash of Greek ambition. Six members of the Cabinet, partisans of the dethroned King, were stood up on the grass beside their own graves and shot so that they crumpled into the pit. The Prime Minister Gounaris was treated with morphia in hospital. Only thus could he be carried to the place of execution. Yet in poor, stricken Greece no amount of blood could wash away the memory of an empire snatched from them and thousands killed in a Trojan victory. Nor could it restore to Venizelos the authority of which a monkey-bite had robbed him.

Kemal was more fortunate. Angora, like Athens, had its surfeit of killing and execution. But for Turkey, unlike Greece, murder marked a beginning, and not an end; the opening of a rich new chapter in her story, not the last flicker of a fitful gleam of greatness.

### III

It was a hot August night in 1926, and at Kemal's house at Chan Kaya, half an hour's drive from the capital, Angora, there were sounds of music and dancing. The guests were in evening clothes, dancing to negro music. The drink was plentiful. Ministers, deputies, ambassadors, were all there, and under Kemal's eye they kept the party fast and furious. As they departed he called his gaming associates around him, and played poker far into the morning. All night he showed high spirits.

What really passed through Kemal's mind in those

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hours of revelry no one can guess. Probably he was crudely callous and unaware. Just possibly he was conscious of the bloodstains which smirched his hands. For four miles away, in the great square of Angora, before a gaping mob eleven men were being hung from giant triangles of wood. Most of them were his close political associates. They had been with him in the conspirator's upper room in Salonika. They had fought with him on countless battlefields against the Greeks. They had hated the foreigner with his same cold, unquenchable fury.

It was Kemal's night of the long knives. • Was he just another ambitious dictator who had kicked in the face and off the ladder those who had helped him to climb to power?

After he had been declared President of the Turkish Republic in 1923 Turkey still retained the full panoply of Western democratic institutions, but Kemal presided over them with the rod of an autocrat. A word from his lips could send a member of the National Assembly off to some outpost prison. A sweep of the pen transformed the status of women and the priesthood. Like Henry VIII, he divorced his wife with his own signature. No department of State was free from his eagle swoop.

All this aroused a murmur of discontent. When the deputies had shouted "*Vive la République!*" they had in mind some National Convention, not the Consulate of Napoleon. And for those who chose to play upon disaffection there were plenty of grievances to excite. A war, perhaps the most pitiless in modern times, was bound to leave a trail of destitution. So far Kemal had not applied himself to the problem.

One deputy in the Assembly rose to denounce him. He voiced the bitterness which Kemal's authority had aroused among the politicians and, more important, the neglect from which the people suffered. It was a brave utterance, but a day or two later the offender was found

dead, strangled by Osman Aga, head of Kemal's body-guard. Osman swore that he acted under Kemal's orders, but Kemal denounced him. Osman retaliated with an attempt to kidnap Kemal. He failed and was killed, but his associates were driven into the ranks of opposition. And as the murmurs grew louder the Kurd tribes who lived high up in the mountains on the Persian frontier rose in revolt with a cry on their lips. "Down with the infidel republic of Angora, and long live the Sultan and the Caliph!"

Behind this revolt Kemal saw the hand of his old enemy, England. He was engaged at the time in a dispute with London over the Mosul oilfields, and he believed that some new Lloyd George had backed the Kurds just as the Greeks had been sent to destroy his people. This presentiment alone can explain the remorseless anger with which he smote back. The wretched Kurds went down within two months amid a welter of massacre, yet even this slaughter could not quieten Kemal's rage. He was convinced that his opponents in the Assembly and their supporters had been in league with the Kurds, and before an excited Assembly he waved a letter which a deputy had written to Sheik Saïd, leader of the revolt. For the moment he had to wait; the men whose necks he wanted broken were old and trusted supporters of the national movement. He had to content himself, therefore, with sending Bald Ali, the hanging judge, through the country with his tribunals of independence, dealing with the smaller fry. It was a Bloody Assize with a new Judge Jeffreys. Yet through the weeks that followed he schemed and conspired until he had the ringleaders in court, with Bald Ali telling the newspapers that the prisoners were guilty and gallows ready before the courtroom door had even opened. Kemal himself waited outside impatiently as the trial continued, like Goering at Leipzig. There were no Dimitrovs.

The world was shocked, but its appeals were worse

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than useless. The prisoners were sacrificed on the altar of a man consumed by hatred of the foreigner's interference in the affairs of Turkey. The memory was too sharp. He had not yet had time to steady his nerve.

Had Kemal been killed by the two assassin's bullets which were fired at him in those evil days his life would have matched the pattern of other leaders who have risen to power and then drowned their *régimes* and their reputations in blood. But he was allowed to run the full course of his destiny. He stayed to found a new nation, able to hold its head erect and its frontiers secure, and in years to come Turkish peasants would trudge fifty miles through the snows of a Turkish winter to see their "Father" pass by.

Moslem tradition still bound his country in fetters of bronze. To break them asunder was Kemal's ambition. Religion to him was the opium of the people. "Islam, this theology of an immoral Arab, is a dead thing," he said. A priest who had protested at some of his views was driven from the room with a copy of the Koran hurtling at his head. Thus he lashed out against every Moslem institution. For the Turkish woman he opened the doors of the harem, and tore the veil from her face, until in the professions, in the schools, in the public offices, even in the National Assembly, women were called upon to play their part. He broke in a few months traditions built up over centuries.

The fez was the mark of the Ottoman and the Moslem. Kemal decided it must go, and himself appeared at a public meeting wearing a panama hat. It was an affront to every Turk, but soon the wearing of the fez was accepted as a criminal offence. Polygamy was condemned, and a new penal and civil code brought the law of the West to govern the descendants of the Tartars. With a blackboard and chalk he instructed the people himself in the use of the Latin script. It was to replace the old Arabic script, which cut off the majority of his people from Europe far more certainly than the narrow



straits between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. And to complete the rout of Islam one night a Bill was passed through the Assembly closing the monasteries, dissolving their organizations, and turning the dervishes into the streets to earn their bread with their own hands. His energy ranged over the whole nation's life. He built roads and railways, drained acres of marshland, and planted forests of trees; he had money for the peasant; seeds were distributed, and new farming methods imported from the West. He was not blind to art; he brought architectural experts from Berlin and Vienna, and demanded a city with wide, open streets. For four hundred years the priests had forbidden the delineation of the human form; he set up a mixed school at Angora to study the nude.

Yet still he was the autocrat. Except in 1930, when he tried a strange experiment of encouraging a party against his own Government, he brooked no opposition. In case of need he would still use his wooden triangles. But, with it all, in the space of a few years he created a new Turkey, capable of a mighty future. He made her a Western Power far more surely than Suleiman the Magnificent, who had hammered at the gates of Vienna in 1529. Other reformers might have striven for years with no effect had not his battering-ram burst the barriers of Moslem custom.

His greatest triumph, however, was in foreign affairs. He gave his people peace. The resurgent nationalisms of the nineteenth century had no sooner achieved their ambitions than they set forth to devour their weaker neighbours. The dictatorships of Germany and Italy have trodden the path of foreign conquest. Kemal established settled friendship with old friends and foes alike. During the days of the Greek war he had been almost friendless among the nations of the world; Soviet Russia was his only ally. Lenin's policy was one of support for rising nationalism in the smaller states against the imperialism of the West. The White generals in

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Russia were performing much the same *rôle* as the Greeks had played in Turkey; Lenin derived much satisfaction from sending British guns captured from General Denikin to help in the defeat of Lloyd George's arms in the Bosphorus. To this first friend Kemal added more recruited among his bitterest foes of earlier years. Even the hated Venizelos visited Angora in 1930, and the *entente* between Greece and Turkey ripened into an alliance. Greece, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, the former vassals of the Ottoman Empire, came to regard Kemal as their protector, but never their overlord. When the waters of the Mediterranean were troubled with Mussolini's ambitions they found a haven of safety beneath Kemal's sceptre. He would suffer no insolence from the man he described as "the swollen bull-frog of the Pontine marshes."

Such was the achievement of one for whom there is scarcely a parallel in history. He had all the military daring of the marauding Turks who swept like a storm across Northern Africa and drove back the might of Christendom; but his talent was for construction as much as for conquest. Like the Italian leaders of the Risorgimento, he drove the foreigner from his country's soil; but he was not confined to one single *rôle*. He was by turn Mazzini the conspirator, Garibaldi the guerrilla chief, Cavour the statesman. He was nearest, perhaps, to Frederick the Great—cruel, ruthless, but the father of his people. Frederick fought for the independence of Prussia, and doted on the literature of France. Kemal fought to save Turkey from the political domination of Western Europe—and forced upon her the civilization of the West. Like Frederick, too, he was most at home in the line of battle. Frederick's men went readily to face death when he cried, "Dogs, would you live for ever?" Kemal had the same faculty of galvanizing a rabble into an army by his relentless will, his unremitting toil, his indifference to danger. Yet in the final judgment Kemal had a humanity, a love of his people, which

Frederick never had. Despite his savagery, despite the bloodstains, he can make just claim to the greatest epitaph which any man ever had, that which Motley gave to William the Silent: "As long as he lived he was the guiding-star of a whole brave nation, and when he died the little children cried in the streets."

## IV

Turkey was to show what the new and invigorated nationalism could achieve. In those immediate years after the War the same force was at work over half the globe.

In the Far East a new China groped its way to nationality under the guidance of Sun Yat-Sen. In India Mahatma Gandhi rode to influence above the mutterings of the Indian peasant. In Arabia Ibn Saud, sleeping almost each night for thirty years with his hand on his sword, was building an Arab dominion more formidable than any which the world had seen since the days of Mohammed. The same spirit seeped through the Arab countries on the Mediterranean seaboard, stirring Syria to revolt, Palestine and Egypt to riot, and achieving its most spectacular evidence in Morocco, where Abd-el-Krim, defying the military power of France and Spain together, displayed anew the Arab genius for war.

Man's mind wrought so terrific a ferment that the works of nature were dwarfed and forgotten. In the year 1923 an earthquake in Japan, perhaps the worst natural disaster since Noah's flood, shattered the cities of Tokyo and Yokohama, killed a hundred and sixty thousand people, and wrecked five hundred million pounds' worth of property. Compared with the convulsions worked by new creeds and erupting nationalism, it was a miniature affair.

Four years of slaughter should have left the world listless and broken. Instead, a new and volcanic energy seized the people of the earth. Across half the globe they

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rose from their knees, kicked clear from the litter -- devastation, and seemed ready to march towards any goal to which red revolution or resurgent nationalism would beckon them. Sometimes smitten pride, but chiefly hunger, was the spur. And if a solid society was to be founded on the ruins of the War men must grapple with the economic chaos which raised new nations from the dust and drove ragged armies on to the streets to rebel.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ALBATROSS

Barrack and bivouac, periodically loaded upon the head of society, to oppress the brain and induce quietude; sword and musket, periodically functioning as judge and administrator, guardian and censor, *gendarme* and night-watchman; military moustache and tunic, periodically acclaimed as the sages and tutelary deities of society—was it not inevitable that, in the long run, it should occur to barrack and bivouac, sword and musket, moustache and tunic, to save society once for all on their own initiative, by declaring their own rule supreme and by saving *bourgeois* society the trouble of self-government?

KARL MARX, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*

BRITAIN and France had the task of saving the world from economic catastrophe. But at Versailles they had shot the albatross. Now it was tied tight round their necks. The burden of Reparations, piled on the German people in the hour of vindictive peacemaking, threatened to drag down all Europe in Germany's ruin. She was to pay £1,000,000,000 by 1921 and £6,000,000,000 altogether—a sum which, it was calculated, if paid in one-mark notes, could build a paper bridge to the moon. Such was the lunacy of the world's rulers at an hour when they had the authority to remodel the life of man like clay in their hands.

Britain and France together might even yet have done something to retrieve the blunder, but now their statesmen were at loggerheads. Clemenceau had gone, condemned as too feeble in the dispensation of vengeance. ("This time," said Lloyd George, "the French burnt their Joan of Arc.") In his place had arisen Raymond Poincaré, fussy, petulant, narrow, stiff-necked, but destined more than any other European statesman to drink the triumph of his policy to the dregs. He was a son of Lorraine, and his mind, like his province, conjured always the spectre of the German eagle. Reparations would be

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paid whatever the cost to the German people. For him, indeed, the War had not yet ended. He pursued his aim of exploiting to the full the Allied triumph on the battlefield with all the diligence of a small man in charge of great affairs.

Already Lloyd George had learned something of this new ruler of France from Clemenceau. During the Peace Conference Poincaré had held the position of President of the Republic, and it was his practice to impose on Clemenceau the additional burden of making long reports at the Élysée. One morning the Conference was kept waiting for more than an hour, at the end of which Clemenceau burst into the room on the point of explosion. "Cannot you lend me George V for a short time?" he whispered in Lloyd George's ear. Throughout those days, therefore, Lloyd George gained the picture of an officious little Pecksniff, with his breast swollen by all the most vicious ideas of revenge. And later, when this man assumed the French Premiership, there were other political difficulties to divide Britain and France. They had been evident at Versailles. They had been exacerbated by differences over the dealings with Russia, when Clemenceau believed in active intervention and Lloyd George hung back; by the conflict of interest in Turkey when France sent arms to Kemal, while Britain was pledged to Venizelos; by the proposal of France at the Washington Naval Conference to build a class of small submarines. Most important of all, however, was the divergence of view on the treatment of Germany and the extraction of reparations. Lloyd George was prepared to order a retreat from Bedlam; he was as ready to negotiate with the Germans as with the Russians. Poincaré stood across his path. Only the most final retribution would satisfy his stunted intelligence. And in the summer of 1920 his resolution was fired by the new voice which crossed the frontier from the stricken land.

The defeat of the Spartacist revolt had unmasked the real rulers of Germany. At the election for the National

Assembly which introduced the Weimar Constitution twenty-five out of thirty million voters approved the republic, and were in name predominantly Socialist and democratic. But when the State needed aid to crush the violent Left it revealed its true nature by invoking the power it was supposed to have superseded. The Reichswehr, with its hundred thousand trained and picked soldiers, officered as much by the aristocracy in 1920 as it had been in 1914, dominated the republican politicians. It maintained from its army headquarters a system of political espionage. It was richly rewarded both in salaries and pensions from the national coffers. Under its patronage private armies were enlisted by the nationalists on the Right for such various purposes as policing the Polish frontier and knocking any incipient Red movement on the head. It was one of these gangs which had thrown Rosa Luxemburg into a Berlin canal. Another, more respectable, was the Steel Helmet, founded on Christmas Day 1918 in Magdeburg by a liquor manufacturer with the avowed purpose of ending the "swinishness of the Revolution." Its complementary aim was to revive "the spirit of the old Army," and Hindenburg was elected its Honorary President. These organizations, founded under the noses of the republican politicians, ensured that the republic itself was no more than a façade. They did not take orders. They gave them. If any proof were needed after the manner in which they had crushed the soviets in 1919 it was shown in 1920 when Herr Kapp, a Prussian civil servant, with the aid of a few miscellaneous soldiers, had led two battalions from the Eastern Marches and seized the Government offices in Berlin. As in the case of the Left revolt, the politicians appealed to the Reichswehr. They got a short answer from General von Seeckt. "There can be no thought," he said to Noske, the Minister of War, "of setting Reichswehr to fight Reichswehr. Is it your intention, Herr Minister, to force a battle at the Brandenburg Gate between troops who a year and a half ago were

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fighting shoulder to shoulder against the enemy!" Noske could have hoped for no clearer indication of whose flunkey he was. Kapp in the end was expelled by a strike of the Berlin workmen, yet still the Reichswehr had the power to ensure that nothing happened to the culprits, and certainly that no penalty was paid by General Ludendorff, who himself testified that he had been at the Brandenburg Gate that March day "quite by accident." These men, in fact, held the republic on a leash. The issue for Germany was whether the numerous democratic forces could break it. Even in those days, two years after Weimar, the chances were not good. For democracy was craven, and German militarism was still arrogant. In these circumstances one man, not a soldier, sought to lead the reactionary, nationalist impulses of the old Germany which no new constitution could smother. His name was Hugo Stinnes. His was the voice which impelled Poincaré towards his more furious vengeance.

It was heard first at the Spa Conference. Half the statesmen of Europe were assembled round the table to discuss Germany's claims. She was represented by the great industrial Kaiser Walther Rathenau, proud, cultured, as conscious a Jew as Othello was a Moor, yet with an abiding love of his Fatherland. He had sat at the Court of the Kaiser. He was the son of one of Germany's biggest industrial and financial magnates. He had inherited huge wealth and industrial power, and had added to his legacy a fine intellect. In the early years of the War he had grappled successfully with Germany's shortage of munitions. Now he was a leading Minister of the new democratic republic, and he stood squarely for what was known as the "policy of fulfilment." He hated Stinnes, and believed that Germany's best hope was to seek accommodation with the victorious Allies. Only thus could she repair her pillaged economy. Only thus could she hope for readmittance into the trade of nations. Only by negotiation could she lift the burden



of Reparations. It was in pursuit of these aims that he led his delegation to Spa.

The conference was quiet. Suddenly Hugo Stinnes rose at one end of the room, thumped his fist on the table, and shouted Germany's defiance. Rathenau settled the storm, while the rough figure muttered beneath his breath a phrase about the "soul of an alien race." The Allied delegates looked on alarmed. They could not see, despite this clear illustration, the nature of the struggle now being waged for the heart of Germany. They dismissed the incident. Yet in fact all Germany was watching the contest between these two men, for already Hugo Stinnes had gained a legendary name among the German people. He had started life as a pit-boy and a stoker, and had risen to employ more than two hundred thousand men in his giant coal and steel trust. All Germany knew his thick black beard, his deep, gazing eyes, his raucous voice. He called persistently for a policy of resistance to Versailles. And the youth of Germany, alongside the soldiers, began to see more hope in him than in the patient courage of Rathenau.

## II

After Spa came Genoa. Bankers, industrialists, journalists, financiers, and all the leading statesmen of Europe—except one—assembled for yet another conference. It was the greatest galaxy of talent and power which Europe had seen since Versailles. Once again Rathenau represented Germany. He was still hopeful that the Allies would listen to argument, still convinced that negotiation could ease the weight of Reparations. He knew, however, that time was running short, that the influence of Stinnes was rising, that another slap in the face from Poincaré might succeed in driving his country into the grasping hands of the nationalists. His fears were just, for Germany's claim did not even occupy the first place on the agenda. That privilege was accorded

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to Soviet Russia, which was represented by the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, M. Chicherin. He came in a top-hat, a frock coat, and white gloves, much to the astonishment of the other delegates, who behaved as if they were extending the hand of friendship to a human gorilla. His chief purpose was to secure a foreign loan and a relaxation of the stranglehold which the Allied Powers had sought to fasten on the throat of his country. He had fewer illusions than Rathenau, and despite the top-hat he was quite prepared, if no concessions were forthcoming, to shed the mantle of diplomacy and resume the more congenial manners of the soap-box. Meanwhile the spotlight was fixed on Lloyd George. His star was sinking in his own country, he was waging a losing battle against the rigid influence of France, but still in the eyes of the delegates the sparkle had lost none of its brightness. Lloyd George himself must have known that this was his last chance. He had striven mightily to manoeuvre France from her position of intransigence. As far back as March 1919, for instance, he had circulated secretly to a few members of the Peace Conference a document which contained this remarkable statement:

The greatest danger that I see in the present situation is that Germany may throw in her lot with Bolshevism and place her resources, her brains, her vast organizing power, at the disposal of the revolutionary fanatics whose dream it is to conquer the world for Bolshevism by force of arms. This danger is no mere chimera.

At the time this statement had been condemned by Clemenceau as a device for extracting concessions to Germany from France. Now, on the eve of the Genoa Conference, this document was given to the British Press, but Poincaré interpreted it in the same sense as Clemenceau. He would not be budged by such trickery, and, in any event, he had already decided how Genoa should end. He wanted to twist the sword in the wounds of Versailles, and he watched the proceedings from his presiding seat in Paris with undisguised contempt, waiting only for his moment to strike.

The stage was set for failure, and M. Chicherin in the opening hours of the conference did nothing to improve the atmosphere. He threw his first bombshell by daring to whisper the word 'disarmament.' All the assembled Powers had, in fact, pledged themselves to disarm on solemn oath, but this little upstart (who incidentally could not disguise his rude political illiteracy by speaking in perfect French and then translating his own speech into perfect English) had the insolence to take the proposition seriously. The delegates raged, and the *Times* newspaper announced that Genoa had become a stage for the Bolsheviks. Lloyd George, however, managed to allay the uproar, and soon the conference turned to discuss the issue of Russia's claim for war compensation from Germany. As this news flashed back to Paris the absent President saw his chance. He set his match to the train of dynamite which he hoped would blow sky-high any idea of concession to the Germans. It seemed that the wily British Prime Minister was to be tricked into the conspiracy, for on a French suggestion private conversations started between the Russians and the Allies at Lloyd George's villa, with the Germans excluded.

This was a blow struck at Rathenau's heart. Earlier in the year he had gone himself to a prison cell in Berlin to meet a young Bolshevik called Karl Radek. From this romantic first meeting the idea had been born of the possibility of a pact between Germany and Russia. Both countries were outcasts from the concert of Europe. Both in one sense were at economic war with the rest of the Continent. Their economies were largely complementary. If neither could secure aid from the West might they not win salvation together? Such was the proposition. The Soviets were ready to sign, for they had small hope of aid from Britain or France. But Rathenau had hesitated. He feared the reprisals with which the Allies might answer such brave independence. He still had hopes that France's mood would change.

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He had waited for Genoa. Now it seemed that even this avenue of escape from isolation was to be barred.

Mystery grew. As no word came of the progress of the talks between Lloyd George and Chicherin, as no response was given to all his entreaties, Rathenau's fears mounted almost to a fever. At 2.30 on Easter Sunday morning he was pacing the floor in his hotel room. He was in his pyjamas, but he could not sleep. Before his eyes in this slumberless nightmare he saw the crash of all his hopes, more years of agony for Germany, and above it all the grinning face of Hugo Stinnes. Suddenly one of Rathenau's subordinates burst into the room. "I suppose you bring me the death-warrant," he asked wearily. Instead it was a message that the Russians were ready to renew negotiations with the Germans, and would be glad if he could meet them at eleven o'clock on the next day. In the early hours of that Easter Sunday morning diplomacy moved fast. Rathenau and his friends left just after dawn, and a few minutes later the telephone bell buzzed in his room. It was an urgent call from Mr Lloyd George, but there was no one left to answer. All day the British searched for the Germans. They were not to be found. And at 6.30 that evening Chicherin and Rathenau were putting their names to the Treaty of Rapallo. The two outcasts from the European family had joined their hands in friendship, perhaps in secret alliance. They seemed to fling defiance in the face of the war-time victors. "Doesn't this new treaty conflict with the Treaty of Versailles?" one of the Soviet delegates was asked. "Treaty of Versailles?" he answered, as if the questioner were raising some issue of purely historical interest. "Treaty of Versailles? I know nothing about it." It had no more relevance than the Treaty of Utrecht.

Panic and anger rose to boiling-point when the news burst into the conference lobbies in Genoa. In the hotel rooms the French delegates packed their bags and trembled at the wrath to come from Raymond Poincaré.

In Paris there was talk of a return to the trenches. Lloyd George stormed and demanded the treaty's withdrawal. He had to be polite to his French allies. But in his eye was a twinkle of satisfaction at Poincaré's rage. He smoothed the troubled waters, and a day or two later his daughter Megan was dancing at the conference hotel with a leading member of the German delegation.

But still Poincaré raged. He threatened to invade Germany single-handed if France's allies failed her, and Lloyd George's attempt to appeal over his head to the French people only heightened his fury. He would break the conference and deal with Germany by more direct means. Thus the delegates departed at his decree. Chicherin went home with the knowledge that he had beaten these rulers of the world at their own diplomatic game. Lloyd George had failed; he could not curb French ambition. Rathenau had snatched one triumph from the conference ruin. In the face of fierce French opposition he had brought back the treaty with Russia. ~~Germany~~ was no longer a pariah. He had gained new esteem for his country round the conference table even if Poincaré was still bent on revenge. Yet in his heart Rathenau knew that this was not enough. Nothing but a diplomatic victory on the major issue of Germany's treatment by the Allies could enable him to withstand the mounting influence of Stinnes. That weapon Poincaré had decided he should never have. The only party in Germany to which French statesmanship would give arms was the Right Wing nationalists who most hated France. Such are the services which great patriots with little minds render to their country.

The answer to Poincaré's intransigence came swiftly. It was executed by a few beer-swilling, swashbuckling youths whose only claim to prowess was the dueller's scar on their cheeks. They met in a Berlin *café* on the night of the 23rd of June—a twenty-five-year-old blue-eyed, fair-headed ex-naval officer; a seventeen-year-old schoolboy, son of a general; another, a son of a Berlin

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magistrate; the rest, meek hangers-on. They talked and drank late into the night, and went into the details of the plot they had concocted. Rathenau was a Bolshevik, a traitor, a Jew. He must pay for his infamy according to German justice. Next morning the German Foreign Minister left his house for the Foreign Office soon after eleven o'clock. He stepped into his open car and drove towards the city. A few minutes later he heard the roar of a pounding engine behind him. A high-powered six-seater tourer shot alongside. It was almost a crash. Suddenly a muffled figure ripped out a revolver, rested it on his elbow, and fired. A split second later a hand grenade hurtled through the air. The young man at the wheel of the six-seater stepped hard on the accelerator. The car shot down the street. Rathenau lay bleeding, and a few minutes later he was dead.

Berlin was aghast. Workers came out on to the streets shouting for revenge on the murderers. The Reichstag met, and a leader of the nationalists was hailed with cries of "Murderer, murderer!" Democratic Germany pointed the finger of accusation, but the men behind the young assassins were never brought to justice. The Jew who sat at the Kaiser's Court, saved his country in war-time, and fought for her rights in the days of peace, was the first victim of the pogrom which was later to devastate his people and defile the name of his Fatherland. Thus the day came when private assassination and murder by night was to be erected into a system of government.

But the wretched republic had not much time to think of the enemy within the gates. Poincaré and the French ironmasters, jealous of the rising steel industry of the Ruhr, had decided to make Germany pay at the point of the bayonet. French troops poured into the Ruhr; one hundred and forty-seven thousand Germans were expelled from their homes; seventy-six Germans were shot in the streets; offices were seized; newspapers were suppressed; Poincaré's hammer sought to beat the nationality of four million Rhineland Germans to splinters,

but they determined to meet it with the iron courage of passive resistance.

In the result Poincaré was triumphant. Germany was compelled to call off the resistance. But one German shared his conquest. He was Hugo Stinnes. He had dared the French to enter the Ruhr. He helped to organize the opposition. He and the class of big industrialists he represented were able to mount in triumph over the calamity of their people. From Berlin a stream of strike pay had come to feed the resolution of the million strikers. The printing press alone could keep alive the disastrous policy of resistance. Soon margarine had become the most stable form of currency. The mark toppled and then pitched down into the abyss, hauling with it the fortunes of a whole middle class. Hugo Stinnes was ready. He was the advocate of "a cheap bankruptcy." He gambled on the fall, and when the livelihood of half the citizens of Germany was snatched from them in a night it was not his factories and mines which sunk into the chasm.

In those six hundred days Stinnes had proved himself the best friend of a young agitator named Adolf Hitler. With the aid of Ludendorff and the Army Hitler attempted to seize power in Munich. He took to his heels at the moment of crisis, and was sent to a commodious prison apartment in Landsberg. He had failed, but, unknown to him and by no effort of his own, he had gained two allies for the future. German wealth had been immensely concentrated into fewer hands. Huge battalions had been added to the potential army of the discontented and the dismayed. The gap between riches and poverty was growing wider. As the first class became smaller and the second larger Hitler's chance improved of intriguing with the one to bamboozle the other.

Poincaré reaped his immediate victory on the collapse of German resistance. Stinnes had the harvest of the future. The work of the vindictive dictator of France and the evil genius of Germany in that mad clash in

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the Ruhr leaves its scar deep on the face of Europe to-day. The world knows how much Hitler owed to Poincaré. But that was certainly less than half his debt. How much more did he owe to the victory of Stinnes, the unavenged murder of Rathenau, the whole system of tolerated jungle law which enabled Stinnes to loot and Ludendorff to plot with impunity, which absolved Herr Kapp and Herr Hitler for their treason, which ensured that private gunmen could plug their bullets into Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht with no fear of penalty! The history of Europe was written more surely in the back alleys of Berlin than in the resplendent council chambers of Genoa.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE GOLDEN AGE

Men met each other with erected look,  
The steps were higher than they took;  
Friends to congratulate their friends made haste,  
And long inveterate Foes saluted as they past.

JOHN DRYDEN, *Threnodia Augustalis*

A TEMPEST had blown across Europe for the six years which followed the War. Suddenly it stilled. Across the Atlantic the United States was caught in a great rush of prosperity. Her fierce explosion of industrial energy piled up a huge mass of capital. American investors turned their eyes to Europe. Soon the creaking machines of industry and trade in Germany and the eastern states of Europe jolted forward, and then regained some of their older smoothness as the rich lubricant oil of America's surplus was spattered over the wheels. And as the Reparations burden was eased, as the unemployment total fell, politics seemed to lose some of the harsh and bitter quality which had made a hell of post-War Europe.

Changes in the men at the head of the great states reflected the new atmosphere. In Germany Gustav Stresemann, son of a saloon-keeper, was ready, it seemed, to pick up the thread of the policy of fulfilment where Rathenau had left it. He was a friendly figure, fat, thick-necked, with a close-cropped head and immense capacities for food and drink. He was shrewd and brave, at times almost romantic, with a skill for forked lightning in debate. Most important of all, he had gained his eminence through a test of fire. In the days before the War he had approved the whole programme of German imperialism. His young brain had been entranced by

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the spectacle of a German fleet challenging Britain, of colonial territories subdued by the German jackboot, of a growing Reich battering its way to world empire. During the War he had given support to all the decrees of the German High Command, and had even rejoiced on the day when the order went forth allowing unrestricted U-boat warfare. "Not the speeches of statesmen," he shouted across the floor of the Reichstag, "not diplomatic negotiations, not diplomatic notes, not Reichstag resolutions, but the hammer of Ludendorff, the strength of our Army, the power of our armed might." Thus he had acclaimed Brest-Litovsk and condemned Versailles with bitter fury. Yet this same man renounced, at any rate for the moment, the claims of German nationalism at the risk of Rathenau's fate, and stood for four years as the emblem of a new Germany.

He first achieved power as Chancellor in the darkest days of 1923, when French troops were in the Ruhr, when the policy of resistance was in full blast, and when the mark was already precipitated over the brink of the apparently bottomless gulf. The printers were on strike; no more banknotes were coming from the presses. Hunger riots were spreading from town to town, and in almost every street shops were being plundered. This was done in the name of the resurgence of Germany, but some Damascus vision had affected Stresemann, who was counted as a chief of the nationalists. His Government summoned all its courage and called off the resistance to the French. For this act Stresemann was compared significantly with Rathenau; the Right Wing Press described him as "the latest outpost of the sages of Zion," and his party lost votes at the subsequent election. Yet by it he gained the strength to withstand the catcalls of reaction when he was called upon to play the same *rôle* on a European stage.

Something had changed, too, in the politics of France. Her people were not ready for ever to pursue Poincaré's vendetta. And in his place had arisen Aristide Briand.

Like Stresemann, he was a great orator. He was, indeed, the greatest in Europe. All the honours in French politics had fallen to his silver tongue, and now a continent rocked to the sway of his rhetoric. He seemed sleepy, some said lazy, and he would wander through the corridors at Geneva, slovenly, unpunctual, and with half-closed eyes. He was a philosopher and a visionary where Poincaré had been a cold, tenacious clerk. Briand liked to stroll through the streets of Paris gazing at the sights; Poincaré sat late in his office examining his documents with meticulous venom. The one looked to the future; the other was corroded by the past. Brittany had superseded Lorraine. "*Mon ami Stresemann*," said *mein Freund Briand*; a strange form of address between French and German statesmen only a few months after French troops had left the Ruhr.

Sir Austen Chamberlain, rising to the office of Foreign Secretary in Britain on the fall of the Labour Government in 1924, completed the triumvirate who were to ring the bells of peace in almost every church-tower in Europe. As an orator he was not the equal of his companions, and this was an age when perorations ruled over the sordid business of diplomacy. So Sir Austen tiptoed a little diffidently into the council chambers of Geneva. He hoped to make Britain the arbiter between France and Germany, but at the same time he professed that he loved France as "a man loves a beautiful woman." With Briand's hand to guide him, therefore, he found things much easier than he had expected. Briand and Stresemann had prepared the way for an armistice in the age-old conflict which had racked Europe. A marriage had been arranged. It only remained for Chamberlain to come as best man and bring his wedding present—a British pledge for the common frontier. Briand and Stresemann both knew what they wanted. Briand believed that a British guarantee for the French frontier would pave the way for a peaceful Europe under French hegemony. Stresemann wanted time for his country to recuperate,

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time for his nation's huge resources of industrial power to impose peace under German hegemony. For these gains both were ready to risk the fury of the intransigents in their own lands. Chamberlain was not so clear what he was doing. He gave a British pledge on the Rhine without securing a disarmed and settled basis for peace between the two ancient enemies. He had played Britain's trump card without winning the trick. But at the time all these stresses and strains were hidden in the mind of the triumvirate. The world snatched the brightening prospect. And in the general enthusiasm for pacts and treaties half the foremost states of Europe sent their representatives to the shores of Lake Maggiore to bury half a dozen hatchets.

It was a splendid scene, the high noon of the age of hope. Stresemann would leave the council table at night to drink beer with the journalists in the *cafés* by the lakeside; the haze of tobacco-smoke and the mellow mists which lager beer induces were working wonders for Europe. Chamberlain arrived at the conference hall in a red-cushioned Rolls-Royce. Briand shuffled in as unpunctual as ever, but in his element; the spirit of Locarno was a fine theme for purple oratory. Mussolini, more befitting a dictator, came by racing car to Stresa and by speedboat to Locarno. Thus in the evening of the 16th of October the treaty was signed. Already the little town on the blue lake was filled with the noise of music. A great crowd collected outside the town-hall. Their shouts competed with the clang of church-bells, and in response to the general clamour the treaty was brought to the window, lit up like an ikon. A roar shook the skies, echoing all round Europe. It seemed at last as if the wicked days of old sores festering into new rancour were banished for years to come.

Yet beneath this surface one who listened might still hear the rumble of all those fiery passions and prejudices which had scorched and scarred so many homes and battlefields in the six years after the official signing of

the armistice. Russia looked on, fearful lest this might be the beginning of some new Holy Alliance to continue unholy war against her. If this was the new brotherhood of nations why was she excluded from the family? Significant too was the evidence that something still burned amid the hot ashes of French and German nationalism. When the King of England made special arrangements to receive the German Chancellor and Foreign Minister a paragraph appeared in the *Action Française*. "The King of England," it said, "would do well, before receiving the war criminals and Boches, to change his name again to what it was once—Coburg-Gotha." That spirit, alive in England as well as France, was to ensure that precious years were lost in further wrangles about the occupation of the Rhineland and the payment of debts. Finally, in Germany reaction burned lower, but was not extinguished. Stresemann was given a better reception than Rathenau, but there were still some who denounced him as "the gaoler of his people." And when at last he was kept waiting for eleven days after his invitation to Geneva while some inside disputed his admittance through the portals of the League of Nations, his own friends advised him to leave. He could have done so then amid the applause of half his nation. Instead he replied stoutly, "That triumph would be too cheap for me." By his courage immediate tragedy was averted. He knew none the less that the Germany of Ludendorff and Stinnes still smouldered and waited only for its chance to burst into flame.

Such were the old passions against which the new prophets fought. They strove powerfully and with great eloquence. Briand himself spoke the epitaph on the great event. He rose at Geneva to welcome Germany into the League. "It is over," he cried, "that long war between us. Ended those long veils of mourning for pains that can never be appeased. Away with rifles, machine-guns, and cannon. Here come conciliation, arbitration, and peace." "We men," added Stresemann,

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"belong to the race that is striving from darkness into light. May the work of the League be accomplished on the foundation of the great ideas of freedom, peace, and unity; thus we shall approach the objects for which we all strive. And to labour cheerfully to this end is Germany's steadfast will."

Six years of armistice, following four years of war, had ended in an agreed peace between the two inveterate enemies of Europe. Was it really beyond the wit of statesmanship to profit from this interval of deliverance?

### II

Europe clambered slowly back up the side of the chasm into which she had been plunged by war and subsequent upheaval. Germany, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary were living on foreign money. They mistook the shifting sand for solid rock. And as the nations that had been battered by the worst agonies felt their foothold more secure they were greeted by sounds of music and dancing. The noise, like the money, came with the Atlantic breezes. Gradually the world realized that a new nation had arisen to usurp the economic mastery of the globe. America, which had entered the War as a debtor, emerged as the creditor of almost every victorious combatant Power. Through seven years she devoted her energy to the construction of the most lofty edifice of commerce and finance which mankind had ever seen. And as she generously shovelled out her surplus to every pauper state in Europe, so she led the dance and set the pace in the realm of culture and amusement.

For one brief moment, it is true, America was caught by the same hopes and fears which remodelled the old world. She struck back against the 'Red scare' in a manner hardly less dramatic than that adopted by Admiral Horthy when he rode on his white horse through Red Budapest. In January 1920 a raid on the Communists resulted in six thousand suspects being gaoled:

by 1921 the Ku Klux Klan, champions of "pure Americanism" and exponents of pure Hitlerism, had gained a membership of half a million, ready to perpetrate any outrage between lynching and private murder upon Jews, dagoes, Catholics, Communists, and any other offenders against American Aryanism. But the tide of hysteria quickly turned into other channels. It was the age of the second American revolution, and the triumphant conspirators were fashion experts, men of science, salesmen, motor kings, advertisers, and, not least, musicians with rhythm in their fingers.

The new world came with a rush in the early twenties. The first broadcasting station was established at Pittsburg in November 1920, and a year later the nation was marvelling at the novelty of a parson who broadcast a sermon from an aeroplane. Sport and ballyhoo were coming into their kingdom. Seventy-five thousand people flocked to see Dempsey flatten Carpentier in the fourth round. The name of Babe Ruth was more familiar than that of President Harding, and down at Atlantic City they were holding the first bathing beauty pageant. The tabloids regaled a whole continent with the novelty, and America danced to the tune of *Yes, We have no Bananas*, sung on a saxophone. Women had just gained the vote, but influences much more potent than the suffrage were revolutionizing their lives. There was a new fashion in dancing, denounced by the puritans as "a syncopated embrace." Skirts were getting shorter, and the outraged legislators in the state of Utah threatened to introduce a Bill forbidding the wearing of skirts higher than three inches of the ankle. Many pure Americans were shocked by the innovations. Lipstick and cigarettes were condemned as the gifts of the devil. For a few years these protestants held their own, but no barrier could for long hold back the tide. By the end of the decade women were exhorted from every hoarding to "Reach for a Lucky instead of a Sweet," or to "Keep Kissable on Old Gold." The nation was spending three-quarters

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of a billion dollars on cosmetics. Skirts went on going upward until they had reached the knee, and the divorce rate sailed in the same direction at equal speed.

There was a craze for crazes. Majong was quickly followed by crossword puzzles, until the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was forced to put dictionaries in all its trains. But the most profitable craze was always sex. A magazine called *True Story* was launched in 1919, distilling each week the same potion of intimate confessions. In seven years it had gained a circulation of two million. The magazines, indeed, began to gain a national significance which the daily newspapers could not rival in a continent so vast. "America," said the wisecrackers, "is an aggregate of independent states loosely held together by the *Saturday Evening Post*." Cigarettes, telephones, ice-cream, cosmetics, electrical devices, motor-cars, radios, advertisements, and above all else the fine new art of ballyhoo were changing the face of America almost as certainly as Kemal's arms raised a new Turkey. It seemed that the dance must go on for ever. And as industry boomed out the fourth year of Coolidge prosperity America prepared for the most uproarious year in her history.

A hundred and forty-five thousand people fought their way into the arena at Chicago to watch Tunney conquer in his return fight with Dempsey. Forty million others heard the story at their radios, and five dropped dead with heart failure at the agony. Thousands more lined in a queue eleven blocks long down Broadway; they rioted and wept outside the little undertaker's establishment where Rudolph Valentino, king of all the kings and queens of Hollywood, was lying in state. A million more battled to get a glimpse of the new Model A Ford at its first showing in New York. It was a tribute to the god whose hand more than any other had transformed the aspect of his country. In ten years the number of cars on the roads mounted from six million to twenty-three million. Four million persons gained their



livelihood direct from the automobile trade. High wages and mounting production in this trade set the pace in countless others.

But, greatest of all, outstripping the seven-year-old famous argument about Sacco and Vanzetti, dwarfing Ford's new model, and condemning Tunney and Valentino to momentary oblivion, the greatest manufactured stunt in all these mad years was the Lindbergh flight. A prize of twenty-five thousand dollars had been offered for the first non-stop flight between New York and Paris. There were already two planes waiting for favourable weather when a young man hopped across from the Pacific coast, and some days later despite drizzling rain hopped off again by himself on the perilous journey. That night forty thousand boxing fans stood in silent prayer at the Mooney-Sharkey fight. A whole nation watched and waited. When he stepped safely on to the air-field at Le Bourget delirium followed. The newspapers splashed it bigger than the Armistice and the crash of the German Empire. Circulations soared, and no one dared challenge the Olympic stature of the new hero.

Only one other name could rival that of Charles Lindbergh. He was a young man, twenty-seven years old, who four years earlier had stuck a board outside a Chicago office with the words, "Alphonse Capone, Second-hand Furniture Dealer, 2220 South Wabash Avenue." His employer, Johnny Torrio, sold beer, and it was Capone's job to break the skulls and wreck the premises of those speakeasy proprietors who were foolish enough to prefer some other brand. He had seven hundred men in his employ, all of them experts with machine-guns, and soon he had superseded his boss and all his rivals in the iron grip which he established over Chicago's ten thousand speakeasies. The revenue of the business was sixty million dollars a year. In six years he had become a dictator more formidable than any Europe had yet produced. His exploits were a good deal more martial than those of Adolf Hitler, his success

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more dazzling, his story more romantic; and when triumph was achieved he rattled through the streets with a dictator's escort, held court like a king, and issued his decrees with the assurance of a Cæsar. Yet even this phenomenon was overshadowed in the huge commercial adventure in which the whole nation was engaged, and which enabled it for five years, so it seemed, to carry stricken Europe on its back.

### III

Britain did not taste her full share of the revival which other nations enjoyed between the years 1925 and 1929. While the states of Central Europe confronted social revolution in the first days after the War Britain's suffering had been confined to a cycle of inflation, unemployment, attacks on wage rates, and fierce industrial disputes. No direct challenge to the social structure was delivered such as Russia, Germany, Hungary, and many other countries had experienced. Britain's rulers had to content themselves with detecting a Red peril in the pink perorations of Mr Ramsay MacDonald, and, with more justice, in the rising temper in the workshops, factories, and mines. The second threat was scotched, but not killed, in the days of Mr Lloyd George's Coalition, which fell in 1922. The first floundered and was discredited with the collapse of the Labour Government in 1924. In that year a Conservative Government was returned to omnipotent power at Westminster. It had a firm majority to pass any measure that it willed and the lucky advantage that everywhere the world seemed set for better days. If these rulers possessed any capacity to build a new world such as they had pledged to the soldiers in the trenches here was their chance. They had not the vitality to seize it. Westminster slumbered whenever it was allowed. Statesmanship hibernated. It was the age of Stanley Baldwin. Who was this prophet of somnolence, and how did he acquire his hold over the energies

of a people which fought four years of war and returned home after it still full of life and endeavour?

A man's fame must be measured by his chances. Stanley Baldwin can have no quarrel on that score. He sucked a silver spoon from the day of his political birth. In the year 1908 he entered the House of Commons with a safe seat and a large bank balance. From that day the gods never deserted him. For years, it is true, they strove unrewarded; the clay refused to mould to their model. All that the records report are comprised in a few commonplace speeches from the back benches, one or two questions concerning the Great Western Railway, of which he had then become a director, together with occasional dashing interventions into the hurly-burly of his uncontested elections in Bēwdley. The rest is unrecorded, and, compared with the schooling of the rivals of his adult days, it was certainly not an auspicious start. While he worked as an ironmaster in Wilden, joined the village cricket team, and opposed a new drainage scheme on the Worcester County Council, Lloyd George was campaigning against the Boer War and Winston Churchill was marching in battle dress. As late as 1916 Stanley Baldwin sat unnoticed on the back benches of the House of Commons. Seven years later he was Prime Minister. Eight years later he was Prime Minister with almighty power. How was it done?

He must thank the gods. During five of those first six years he rose by the usual stepping-stones to a place in the Cabinet, yet it is safe to say that no one in 1921 associated his name with the Premiership. Then the gods intervened. They led him unscathed from the falling ruin of Lloyd George's Coalition. They made him a participant in Bonar Law's triumph over Lloyd George's proposal for war with Turkey which Baldwin had backed in the Cabinet. And when Bonar Law was stricken by ill-health, Curzon disqualified as a peer, and the other Conservative leaders ruled out by their attachment to Lloyd George, they raised Baldwin as the only

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candidate for the Premiership. He was left standing in lofty eminence like a hillock in the Fen Country.

Momentarily, it is true, the isolation was embarrassing. For the country had not yet learnt that this man who had become a Premier by accident was as ordinary as themselves, that he was "honest" ("to the verge of simplicity," as Lloyd George added), or even that he was safe. This tale of the simple Englishman's resignation to the cares of State had still to be told. All that the country knew was that he had been sent to Washington to settle the question of the American Debt, that he had saddled his nation with a payment of thirty or forty millions a year for half a century, that he had returned to sit silent before his Premier, Bonar Law, whom he had committed to a settlement he was expressly charged to avoid. But the gods drew a discreet veil over this unhappy past, and they had more favours for the future. In 1923 he forced an election on the issue of Tariff Reform which Balfour described as "unhappy folly" and Curzon as "political insanity," yet he was not allowed to suffer for his sins. A year later he was returned to office with the same commanding position in British politics which Gladstone held in 1870, Disraeli in 1874, and the Liberal Party in 1906. If Conservatism had any further benefits to bestow on the British people it could not have hoped for a better opportunity to match the achievements of those memorable administrations.

In the first hours after the sweeping victory at the polls it seemed that Stanley Baldwin appreciated the chance. Discontent was still powerful in the industrial areas of Britain, and he was ready to tackle the task. It was a theme close to his heart. At the little iron-foundry in Wilden no threat of strike ever interrupted the idyllic sweetness of relations between master and man. Why could not the blessings of Bewdley be conferred on the people of Durham and South Wales? Throughout his career he had never lost the memory of that happy ideal. It had formed the topic of his first speech in the House;

he knew the British working man, and spoke with feeling against a proposal to limit miners' hours to eight hours a day. He was still ready in 1924 to heal the breach by friendly collaboration. When, therefore, a Conservative Member introduced a Bill to debar a trade union from raising a political levy from its members he opposed the proposition in noble language. "We are not," he said, "going to push our political advantage home at a moment like this. Suspicion is preventing stability at home. To-day we offer the country this; we at any rate are not going to fire the first shot. We stand for peace. We stand for the removal of suspicion in the country. We want to create a new atmosphere, a new atmosphere in a new Parliament for a new age, in which the people can come together." These surely were the words of national statesmanship.

It was not Mr Baldwin, therefore, but the coalowners who fired the first shot. The War had lost for Britain many export markets which she never recovered. The return to the Gold Standard in 1925 enormously aggravated the difficulties of industry. It was in no fettle to meet such a dual blast, for the nation's coal production was most inefficiently organized, while the recommendations for drastic reform from successive Royal Commissions had been consigned to pigeonholes by a few frowns from the industry's leaders. Between their own intransigence and the prospect of declining markets the coalowners saw only one remedy. The miners must either work longer or take less, or both. Notice was given that from the 30th of June, 1925, wage-cuts would be imposed, that the principle of the minimum wage must be abandoned, and that in future agreements must be arranged on the old district rather than national basis. It was a direct challenge to all the fighting spirit of the most militant section of British workers. It threatened a return to the ferocious struggles of four years earlier. Mr Baldwin saw the collapse of his dreams. There seemed no escape unless he were prepared to coerce one party

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or the other. The miners stood fast. They appealed to the General Council of the Trade Union Congress. The General Council backed them, and in turn appealed to the Premier. What could he do? At first he was content with the bland reply that the industry must settle its own affairs. On no account could the Government consider the grant of subsidy to tide over the difficulties. That was the answer given on the 28th of June. Three days later, when no alternative appeared to national stoppage, he changed his mind. A subsidy costing the Exchequer £24,000,000 was announced to prevent the disaster, to give time for another Royal Commission to report, time, as Mr Baldwin said, for "the angel of peace to come, bringing healing in his wings." At this the miners were jubilant. On the day the concession was announced *Daily Herald* posters all over the country celebrated the victory with the simple words, "Red Friday."

Some of Mr Baldwin's supporters were fiercely indignant at his action; they resented these carousals on the Left. Others of them, more shrewd, applauded his action. Mr Winston Churchill, for instance, gave the reason for their satisfaction. "We decided," he said, "to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not, of coping effectually with it when it comes." With this aim in view, while the Royal Commission under Sir Herbert Samuel prepared its report, a Government organization was built up capable of smashing any threat of general strike. Coal reserves were accumulated. A voluntary strike-breaking organization, called the Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies, was instituted. The country was divided into ten areas, to be governed by Civil Commissioners who would be empowered to "give decisions on behalf of the Government." Thus Mr Baldwin's administration made good use of the nine months' interval which his subsidy had bought. How Mr Baldwin himself, the believer in collaboration between the classes, regarded this interval we do not know; we can only judge by his actions. The

Royal Commission reported. It satisfied neither miner nor mine-owner, for from the one it required a reduction in wages and from the other an overhaul of the industry and a surrender of mineral royalties to the State at a suitable fee. Neither miner nor mine-owner would budge, and Mr Baldwin was left with nothing gained by his expenditure of twenty-four millions of the taxpayer's money, except the institution of his Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies. Yet he was still the ruler of the nation, and he still possessed his Liberal faith. How would he use the power? Would he coerce the coal-owners, or would he coerce the miners? Or would he enforce on both parties the proposals of the Samuel Commission with its recommendations, which had cost about three million apiece? The answer was given in the last days of April 1926. On Thursday, April 29, the delegates of the unions assembled in London, at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street. They listened to the reports of their leaders, and throughout the next day were sitting in the same hall, occasionally relieving the boredom by singing *Lead, Kindly Light*, and other community song items. They waited on news from Downing Street, where their leaders were negotiating. Mr Baldwin offered a lengthening of hours, which the Royal Commission had condemned as useless, and a decrease in wages without any guarantee that the other recommendations of the Commission would be enforced. Against this proposition Mr J. H. Thomas (in his own words) "grovelled." "In all my long experience," he said, "I never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded that day." It was all to no avail, and when the news of deadlock was brought to Farringdon Street the Unions voted overwhelmingly for strike action. That well-known fire-eating agitator Mr Ernest Bevin spoke the spirit of the meeting. "We look upon your 'yes' as meaning," he cried, "that you have placed your all upon the altar for this great movement, and, having placed it there, even if every penny goes, if every asset goes,

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history will ultimately write up that it was a magnificent generation that was prepared to do it rather than see the miners driven down like slaves." With these words burning in their ears the delegates rose, sang *The Red Flag* as it has never been sung before or since, and poured out of the hall, ready to take their place in the industrial trenches.

Next day, while the workers celebrated May Day in their millions, their leaders reopened negotiations with the Government. There seemed a chance of last-minute settlement, and fierce argument went on in a room in Downing Street between the miners' chiefs and General Council leaders in an attempt to persuade the miners to accept a reduction in wages. In the midst of these talks a request came from the Prime Minister for their attendance in his room. "Gentlemen," said Mr Baldwin when they arrived, "I am sorry to say that our efforts for peace are unavailing. Something has happened at the *Daily Mail*, and the Cabinet has empowered me to hand you this letter." Mr J. H. Thomas read it. At the *Daily Mail* office workers had started a lightning strike, demanding the deletion of a leading article which made a fierce attack on the plan for a general strike, and which called for its suppression "by every resource." The Cabinet letter asked for immediate repudiation of this action. Mr Thomas complied, and hurried off to obtain an official repudiation from his negotiating committee. The document was signed. The trade union leaders returned to Mr Baldwin's room. They found that the lights were out and the room empty. They called a servant. He told them that Mr Baldwin had gone to bed, and did not wish to be disturbed. Some one had fired the second shot.

Next day the battle was on. Trains, trams, buses, and newspapers stopped. Transport workers, printers, iron and steel workers, metal and chemical workers, building, electrical, and gas workers—these and countless others put down their tools in the cause of the miners. Of all



the unions under the control of the T.U.C. the Seamen's and Firemen's Union was the only one of importance which refused to obey the command. Throughout the industrial areas of Britain the wheels which had made her trade the mightiest in the world suddenly stopped dead, and a great silence descended on the island's workshops, broken only by the noise in the streets outside. Here food lorries passed, some with the inscription in bold black and yellow, "By permission of the T.U.C." Others, which had not the fortune to carry this strange banner, were often heaved over on their sides or impounded in some near-by field. Local councils of workers in every area organized the food supply and the other affairs of the strike. They decreed what traffic should be allowed to move in their locality. They poured scorn on the efforts of the amateurs whom the Government imported to run the services. "The strike is over," said a bulletin in Kensington;

only 400,000 N.U.R. men are now on strike, plus 1,000,000 miners and 2,000,000 others. But three trains are running in Manchester, and there is a five-minute service every two hours on the tubes. . . . Sir John Simon says the General Strike is illegal. The 3,000,000 strikers are advised to keep in hiding, preferably in the park behind Bangor Street, where they will not be discovered.

In Preston it was suggested that after the blackleg amateur signalman at Ribble Sidings had failed for forty-five minutes to get an engine into the sidings and out again, "the engine went to the shed disgusted." All over the country the same spirit was maintained. For nine days there was no considerable breach in the strikers' ranks.

But they had great odds against them. Under the Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies strike-breakers were recruited to carry on the services which the workers had stopped. Young men from the universities left their studies to drive buses and trains, and

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down on London docks ships were unloaded behind the protection of battalions of Guards. Mr Winston Churchill published his *British Gazette*. It proclaimed the Government's intention to smash the strike. And when the Archbishop of Canterbury appealed for a compromise solution his call was suppressed. From the B.B.C. there poured announcements of "returns to work" which had not in fact taken place. The Government, it seemed, would give no quarter. Mr Baldwin alone spoke in a less ferocious tone. "I am a man of peace," he said in a broadcast to the nation. "Cannot you trust me to ensure a square deal, to secure even justice between man and man?"

The strikers did trust him, or, rather, their leaders. Sir Herbert Samuel, acting, as he said, with no instruction from the Government, drew up a memorandum of settlement which still involved a cut in the miners' wages, but which the General Council of the T.U.C. believed offered an escape from a fight they had never sought or enjoyed. Despite the continued opposition of the miners, despite the firm resolve and discipline which still prevailed among the rank-and-file strikers, despite Sir Herbert Samuel's statement that he had no guarantee his terms of settlement would be accepted by the Government, the T.U.C. decided to break off the strike, trusting no doubt in the "man of peace," who on the day of the surrender spoke in the Commons proclaiming his intention "to work in a spirit of co-operation, putting behind us all malice and vindictiveness."

How that hope was fulfilled only the facts can portray. That same afternoon a notice was issued stating that His Majesty's Government had no power to compel employers to take back every man who had been on strike. Employers in many industries accepted the cue; for their returning workmen they had prepared a welcome which included sometimes an abrogation of trade union conditions, sometimes a wage-cut. No offer was made to the miners, who were left to fight their struggle alone.

Little was heard of Sir Herbert Samuel's recommendations. And less than a year later came the final blow. The trade union movement was down and out. The Government did not hesitate to apply the kick. A Trades Disputes Act was rushed through the Commons, robbing the worker of union rights which he had held since 1906. It was to leave a trail of bitterness and resentment throughout the industrial areas of Britain for years to come. Yet it marked a notable return to that earlier system, still fully operative in Bewdley, where capitalist and blackleg worked together in unruffled contentment.

Mr Baldwin, indeed, emerged from this conflict a mature statesman. By sledgehammer blows ~~the~~ most considerable movement of industrial unrest in Britain since the days of the Chartist~~s~~ had been broken and dismembered. The assault was conducted with such success that never since that defeat has the same spirit been awakened in the working homes of Britain. For that result part of the responsibility must be borne by the leaders of the movement itself. But credit must not be withheld from the man who so neatly supplied the iron fist with a velvet glove. It was his formula of Liberal phrases covering a Conservative policy which brought his Government support outside the usual ranks of the Conservative Party, which made possible the delusion of the trade union leaders and empowered them in turn to delude their followers. In fact, such was the success of the strategy that soon it was accepted by Mr Baldwin as the substitute for a policy. Henceforward under his leadership the Conservative Party appeared to have little other aim but its own preservation as the predominant influence in the State. In the days of Disraeli or Joseph Chamberlain the Conservative Party had a programme. For thirty years it had battled for Tariff Reform and Imperial Preference. Mr Baldwin renounced this aim for fear of losing his Liberal support; he would not risk the predominance of his party, and preferred to wait till 1932, when a Government returning victorious from the

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polls on another issue could rush through the measure with electoral safety. Similarly, before the strike, Liberal principle in accord with his own Liberal phrases should have induced him to impose the Samuel Commission recommendations on coalowner and coalminer alike. That action would have lost him the support of his Right-Wing diehards. He preferred to forfeit principle rather than break his party. This precaution has influenced Conservative statesmanship ever since Sir Robert Peel took the opposite course, carried his reform, but splintered his party for generations in the process. Mr Baldwin had learnt that warning well. And for this reason no use was made of the five clear years in which a secure British Government had the opportunity to restore Britain after the havoc of the War. The rich men who formed the backbone of the Conservative Party demanded that there should be no step forward along the road of progress. On the other hand, the preservation of Conservative supremacy required that they should appear to have inherited at least half of the tradition of the dying Liberal Party. With a slight interregnum in 1929 Mr Baldwin achieved the feat. For his purpose he needed dupes in the country and hirelings in Parliament. There were plenty of the first, and in the House of Commons there were the followers of Sir John Simon.

This, then, is the clue to the statesman who has held greater power for a longer period than any other man in the post-Great War Britain. His genius must be sought neither in the catalogue of laws nor in the business of administration. It was a triumph of personality and strategy, discernible most clearly in his style of speaking. He was not an orator. Rather he scorned the flashing points of the platform. Winston Churchill treats his hearers to the lightning of an epigram or the rolling thunder of fine prose. Lloyd George lays waste every obstacle in his path like a prairie fire; the hot flame of anger, the piercing heat of ridicule and invective, leave behind a trail of opponents scarred and mutilated.

Stanley Baldwin was gifted with none of these arts, yet he made the most of his infirmity. A speech from him resembled neither an earthquake nor a fire; it was more like an overheard soliloquy. Where Churchill would illumine and Lloyd George would scorch, Baldwin would befuddle. He was the master of eloquent irrelevancies. Did the debate turn on the bitter conflict of the coalfields? He would talk of the apple-blossom in Worcestershire. Did the House want facts about rearmament? He would give them philosophy on the dark horrors of war. Was the issue tariffs? He could tell them of the iniquities the machine age had brought in its train. Did his party ask for guidance on principle and policy? He was ready with a glimpse into the secrets of his heart, the dreams of his childhood, the hopes for his old age. The picture of the bluff little Englander, contemptuous of office, homesick for Bewdley (or Aix-les-Bains), but steadfast in his duty at Downing Street, was painted by his own hand in the lengthy digressions which formed his substitute for oratory. It hardly ever failed. And if the crisis were severe, or the Whips scented danger in the voting lobbies, he could be relied upon to add a spice of mystery to the recipe. His lips were sealed. He would speak with appalling frankness, or in the last resort strike his critics dumb with an avowal of incompetence so abject that their strongest outcry appeared tame and listless. He would appear on the Treasury Bench in the guise of a sitting rabbit while members passed out to the lobbies marvelling at this display of self-flagellation.

This was Stanley Baldwin, and he left his stamp on an era. In later years, as he continued to hold power for his party against all buffets, a mystical prescience was attributed to his statesmanship, until undeserving and aspiring young Conservatives made speeches and wrote monographs applauding the genius that they could not define. The correct estimate was written by Junius of another statesman of a more indolent century: "He did good by stealth. The rest is on record."

## THE GOLDEN AGE

### IV

Britain's problems did not disturb the belief that the world was set for a new and better age. M. Briand was at work on his treaties again, and in Mr Kellogg, from the United States, he found an eager collaborator. Fifty states signed the Briand-Kellogg Pact. Thus only three years after the nations of the world had pledged themselves to peace at Locarno they were outlawing war in Paris. There was even talk of disarmament, to which the Powers had pledged themselves at Versailles, and at Geneva a Preparatory Commission assembled to consider the problem. The conference, however, was disturbed by a proposal from Soviet Russia calling upon the Powers to strip themselves altogether of their arms, or, failing that, to make something of a start. It was roundly condemned as Utopian and Bolshevik propaganda. M. Litvinov, the Soviet representative, accepted the reproof. "This time," he said, "we are ready to accept the challenge, and to declare that this is indeed propaganda for peace. . . . But if the Preparatory Commission for Disarmament is not the proper place for peace propaganda, then it must be assumed that we are here through a misunderstanding." With this interval the delegates turned back to review their agendas. There need be no hurry. Every nation talked peace.

More gratifying even was the success on the economic front. The Reparations load was lifted by the simple device of loaning Germany more than she paid back; she put a threepenny-bit in the chapel plate and took out a shilling. Every state in Eastern Europe benefited by the same bounty. As long as America continued to pump capital across the Atlantic the merry-go-round looked as if it could go on for ever, and America had no doubts on that score. In 1928 Herbert Hoover issued coins for his election fight engraved with the words, "Good for four years' prosperity." The United States, he said, had solved the problem of slump.

## ARMISTICE: 1918-39

Ten years of Europe's labour had fashioned a new world. The tiger of revolution had been beaten back to its lair. Germany seemed ready to forget Versailles and the Ruhr; indeed, the agitator Adolf Hitler had just suffered a setback at the polls. Britain and France were on better terms than at any time since the signing of the Armistice. Politicians did not disguise their satisfaction. And the world of business sat down to dinner in the evening tipsy with the hallucination of unending boom.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CRASH

Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky  
With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In adamantine chains and penal fire.

JOHN MILTON, *Paradise Lost*

WE in America to-day are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poor-house is vanishing from among us. We have not reached the goal, but, given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty shall be banished from this nation." Herbert Hoover, Republican candidate for the Presidency of the United States, was no orator, but a great surge of cheering drowned his words and washed him into the White House.

For twelve full months the United States became a nation of stockbrokers. Big investors hauled back their funds across the Atlantic and tipped them into the New York market. Barbers talked Montgomery Ward to faces of lather. Nurses cajoled their patients for the latest tip about Anaconda. Union Carbide and General Motors were names as familiar as Babe Ruth and Bobby Jones. Every newspaper in the bus was opened at the financial page. Tunney had just defeated Dempsey, but America still turned next morning to find the price of Radio and Electric Bond. Delirium had seized a people, a continent of men and women soaked with drunken optimism, dizzy with triumph scored over every setback, plunging on while all the sober experts of finance and economy stood by and cheered, singing from the housetops the crazy song, *Be a Bull on America*, shouting in the last, final spasm of intoxication that the millennium had come.



Then five days that shook the world.

On the night of Thursday, October 23, 1929, Professor Irving Fisher was still expecting a recovery of prices; another financial Titan said, "Stocks have hit bottom," a third that the market was healthy. And why not? Many a worse crisis than this tipsy America had brushed aside in its lurch. To-morrow the party would swing on with its old accustomed riot.

It was a cold and bitter morning. For a few trembling, precious moments prices were steady, although selling was enormous. Then they toppled, and within minutes the swirl had changed to a swoop. The confident prophets of yesterday were not buying. By eleven o'clock the ticker had long since failed to keep pace with the scramble. The floor of the Exchange became a shouting, seething mob. Panic had come, and seconds later it had swept a whole nation. For rising above the news which raced out of New York was the great, presiding fear of the unknown. The ticker was an hour and a half late. If things were bad then what must they be now?

A crowd had gathered outside the Exchange. Just after twelve they recognized Charles Mitchell, Chairman of the New York National City Bank and one of yesterday's optimists. He crossed the street to confer with Thomas Lamont at the offices of J. P. Morgan and Company. At the meeting five leaders of American finance decided to put up forty million dollars each to stay the market. It was a brisk decision, and a few minutes later Mr Lamont faced the reporters. "There has been a little distress selling on the market," he said. It was due to the "technical conditions."

The trick worked. That afternoon the pit seemed to have a bottom after all, and Friday and Saturday were certainly better. President Hoover issued a comforting statement from the White House, and America nerved herself for another swig at the speculative bottle. Light burned all through Saturday and Sunday nights in the brokers' offices, but there was still hope. And next

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morning the London *Times* informed the British people that "the world should now be able to look forward to a gradual return to normal finance." But Monday in New York was bad again, and when the big gong sounded in the hall of the Exchange at ten o'clock on the Tuesday it was the end. Prices pitched uncontrollably. Telephones jammed. Three million shares sold within half an hour, eight million by twelve o'clock, twelve million by half-past one, and at the sound of the closing gong the colossal total of seventeen million.

The worst was over. The White House piped another prosperity tune. John D. Rockefeller announced that he was buying common stocks. But all these voices were smothered. America had other news—the mounting pile of suicides, banks slamming their doors in the face of panic, plunging prices, growing queues of jobless, whole families raked down overnight from affluence to penury, rubbish stacks of unsaleable goods, and above all else the shattered dream of avarice and fortune. Down on Broadway they were showing Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights*. A queue formed outside the theatre. "What's that," asked a passer-by—"a bread-line or a bank?"

For generations this people had thanked God that it was not as other nations. For ten dizzy years none were able with success to contest the boast. And while the party lasted America was able to believe with unshakable faith in her own concoction of myths. Thick-necked financiers who travelled in air-conditioned railway coaches and who never poked their noses outside their central-heated offices without a solid wrapping of fur regarded themselves as a race of rugged adventurers who accumulated their wealth by solid individual effort in the heights of the Alleghenies and the swamps of the Mississippi. Ambitious politicians with their eyes on the White House who had never done a stroke of honest work in their lives convinced themselves by the age of thirty that they had been born in a log-cabin. Potentates who spent their time seeking a crevice through which they could wriggle

round the anti-trust laws persuaded themselves that in this land of the free it was thrift and abstinence which won the garland. Industrial leaders who could sway with one word the destiny of countless human beings were held up as examples to the men they drove back into their factories with tear-gas to work at dictated wages. Sheer individual genius in fixing the same nut on the same screw a thousand times a day, countless million times a year, could win for these serfs the same eminence as their lords. Such was the great American tradition. All would start equal in the great race in pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. No one seemed to notice that 5 per cent. were stripped ready to run, while the rest had great loads shackled to their feet. No one seemed to notice, that is, until the winners accumulated such a store of prizes that they vomited the surfeit. This was the ugly scene which took place in the United States in 1929, and America wondered in her subsequent three years of agony whether in fact her myth had crashed with the stock prices in that fearful October cataclysm. None could deny now that the frontiers of America were no bar against the hunger and wretchedness which affected less happily born mortals. When farmers in the South found their crops unsaleable, when industrial workers were thrown out in thousands from Pittsburg to San Francisco, when depression spread to Florida and Los Angeles, when fifteen million people woke without a penny in their pockets, who would dare announce that the race was to the swift?

America had lost her philosophy in those mad Wall Street days. She must grope through darkness and dismay until she found a new one. For three years, therefore, rage and despair swept the country until a man arose who could answer both sentiments. Were his countrymen bent on revenge? He would drive the money changers from the temple. Were they downcast? He would tell them in a voice that thrilled that this generation had a rendezvous with destiny. Franklin Roosevelt was no

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revolutionary. It was not his plan to draw up a totally new set of rules in the great American race for riches. But he at least decreed first aid for cripples, fewer side-bets off the course, fewer ankle-taps on it, and a levy on the winners to console the losers. This was no small achievement, for it meant that the great scramble would not go on without sentiment or pity. Hollywood had soon enshrined the new philosophy in an easily assimilable form. The gold-diggers of 1934 sang a new song. Before a chorus of workless men lining up in their queues for their relief pay an old fishwife leant from her window and wailed, "Remember my forgotten man." There were some fifteen million forgotten men in this land of equal opportunity.

### II

By laborious effort America climbed back, not to the dizzy peak of 1929, but at least to some stable foothold. The rest of the world had not the same fortune. Those five hectic days on the New York Stock Exchange were the signal for much more than the closing of the era of Harding and Coolidge. They killed the bright gleam of Locarno. They turned the dreams of Briand and Stresemann to nightmares. They tipped Asia over the precipice into war. They reduced France and raised Germany. They brought man back to the era of the early twenties, when history was made by ragged armies on the streets and marching armies on the battlefield. For America had cut Europe's lifeline of capital. She had raised huge tariff walls against the world's trade and debt payments. She had sucked gold reserves to her cellars and helped to drive down prices. For a few brief months her own collapse was hidden while her surplus was spilt into the New York gamble. Now there was nothing to stay the plague from spreading its contagion into every state in every continent. By 1933 there were thirty million workers unemployed; world trade had fallen to 30 per cent. on the 1929 level.

In quick succession five South American states revolted against dictators who had borrowed from New York. There was ferment in Burma and the Dutch East Indies. Peasant unrest swept India into the most considerable revolt against British rule since the Mutiny. Back in Europe falling prices, mounting debts, and growing unemployment brought crisis on crisis. Vienna's chief bank had to close its doors. Defaults followed in Germany, and Britain's financial structure was undermined and her Labour Government expelled in the same crash. At Geneva and in London the statesmen assembled to put the Humpty-dumpty of peace and prosperity back on the wall. But already the sound of guns drowned their perorations. A bomb outrage at Mukden in September 1931 had set the Far East ablaze. Japan, diseased by the same economic blight, was pouring troops into Manchuria, and within a year thirty million Chinese had been subdued beneath the Japanese bludgeon.

The new conqueror came to Geneva with a bad brief, a big army, and a good lawyer. Sir John Simon managed, in the words of the Japanese delegate, to say in a few hours what he had been trying to say for days. Not a finger would be raised in the West to interfere in the affairs of the East. After that all else was academic. Europe, in any case, had little time to think of Asia. There were three million unemployed in Germany. Half the young men between sixteen and thirty-two were without work. Slump was trundling Versailles to oblivion, and the nation of Frederick and Bismarck and the Kaiser was girding itself anew in the panoply of war.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIRST APPEASER

What mean their bells and trumpets, their horns and flutes, but  
"Come hangman, come vultures."

DANTE

NOTHING had been omitted from the accumulation of horrors heaped on the Weimar Republic in its ten years of life. In the first hours it had been compelled to suffer defeat and ignominy and hunger. Giants were needed to grapple with these impositions and impart to the new *régime* dignity and power of decision. Instead, political pigmies inherited the mantle of the Hohenzollerns; none of them possessed the stature to confront Ludendorff and Stinnes and make them pay for their crimes. The one made his plots and the other his money with impunity. As they had no instinctive affection for the new republic the great mass of Germans therefore would discriminate between its friends and its enemies only by the test of which party was likely to win. They saw that the Government itself invoked the aid of the enemies of the republic in order to suppress the violent Left, while the Right could employ worse violence without any fear of reprisal. For this reason Weimar became branded with another name; to defeat and ignominy was added the charge of cowardice. But this was only the beginning. Soon Poincaré's knife sliced its pound of flesh from the living body of the republic; a few were enriched and many impoverished by the rocketing inflation; and in the later years of the twenties, although the burden was eased, and although Stresemann rescued some self-respect for his countrymen, there was no final assertion of the authority of Weimar in the minds of the German people such as was needed if the subsequent

buffetings and blows were to be successfully repelled. In 1930 slump added its disfigurement to a land already diseased by a multitude of afflictions. On every hand could be seen the ruins left by the vindictiveness of foreign statesmen and the pusillanimity of German statesmen. The Right Wing parties were disloyal, the Left disunited, the centre impotent. And amid this wreckage of democratic hopes moved always the ghost of German militarism, clanking its armour and chains. As the years passed the apparition assumed shape and bones and solid flesh. It was symbolized in the bristling, gruff figure of President von Hindenburg. Through him the memory of the past haunted the new republic. But it was another representative of the military order who gave substance to the shadow. He was General Kurt von Schleicher.

This man had been a brilliant young staff officer before the War, and in the War itself he gained his triumphs far from the battlefield in the administrative quarters of Berlin. He was known as the "Bureau General." When the Empire perished he found himself sitting in his office at the Ministry of War under the supervision of General von Seeckt. Here in 1919 he first gave his mind to politics. On his advice the Social Democratic politicians called in the aid of the Army 'volunteers' to suppress the Spartacists; on his instruction Army leaders refused to fire on the Right Wing insurgents who seized Berlin in 1920; at his incentive troops were dispatched in 1923 to establish martial law in Saxony and Thuringia, where Labour Governments had started to form worker battalions. Together with von Seeckt he helped to keep the Army stiffly professional and groomed in the old Prussian traditions, but whereas Seeckt was always a soldier, Schleicher was obsessed more and more with politics. He maintained from his Reichswehr office an intricate system of espionage which probed into matters that had nothing to do with war, and on this account, together with the fact that he and Seeckt

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were rivals for the hand of the same woman, he quarrelled with his chief. In the middle of the twenties the tussle became fiercer. Schleicher lost his woman. He might also have lost his job had it not been for a fortuitous access of strength to his elbow. In 1925 Marshal Hindenburg was elected President of the Republic. Schleicher was the old regimental comrade and intimate friend of the President's son, Oskar. By this backstairs entry to the old man's confidence, which so much suited Schleicher's talent, he gained the day. Seeckt, despite his prowess as a soldier, was thrown to the wolves. Schleicher was established as the ruler of the Reichswehr and the closest adviser of the President. Henceforward three men—Schleicher, Oskar, and a lickspittle secretary called Meissner—instructed the old Marshal on all matters of politics. Occasionally they were joined by a fourth—the Chancellor of the German Government, the accredited representative of the German people. But as the President had seven of these in nine years, as most of them were civilians who could not talk the language of soldiers, and as some of them were Catholics who offended the old man's Protestantism, or Social Democrats who offended his love of autocracy, it was the permanent advisers whose advice was likely to be accepted. And of the three men who chattered in his ear Schleicher possessed the most authority, the best cunning, and the richest ambition. He was a man of wide tastes and capacity. In the *salons* he would strut before the ladies. "The red cloak I wear now as a general," he would say, "will soon become an executioner's cloak, when in the public squares we have to deal with our enemies." Back in his Reichswehr office he continued to pull more political strings into his own hands. Most important of all was his tightening hold on the President. His power grew, and his ambition grew with it. By 1930, when slump came to give a new incisiveness to German politics, he had had eleven years of intimate, uninterrupted contact with affairs of State such as no other German could match. He looked



to the future and could see no rival of equal attainments. Clever, industrious, vain, brutal, faithless, the master of intrigue, he believed that Germany could be fashioned to his model. For three years before the Nazi fist delivered its final punch politics in Germany pirouetted round him.

From his office in Berlin Schleicher could hear the noise in the streets outside. Unemployment had risen to the three million figure, and the Social Democratic Premier, with his miscellaneous followers of Democrats, Centrists, and Socialists, had no will to combat the problem. The murmur of other voices grew louder, till it mounted to a cacophony which streamed in through Schleicher's window. The Communists were strong and vocal, but their censures were reserved chiefly for the numerous but feeble Social Democrats. Others were denouncing Versailles and the Jews as the origin of Germany's suffering. Among these was an agitator in Munich called Adolf Hitler, now at last extending his influence to Berlin, whom Schleicher knew all about from his files in the Reichswehr office. This man had, in fact, for several years been on the Reichswehr pay-roll in Munich. He had worked for them as a political spy and later as a kind of unofficial recruiting agent. Now he had become more independent. A year earlier—in March 1929—he had made a speech in which he had said to the Reichswehr leaders, "With your help I could conquer." For the leader of a party with only eight hundred thousand electors among its supporters in the country the boast was ridiculous. Schleicher had laughed. He had other ideas. He wanted a rearmed Germany, and behind secret doors the factories were already busy. But now something more was needed; something must be done quickly to empower the clique which surrounded Hindenburg to override the Reichstag and grapple with the growing economic chaos. With that aim Schleicher suggested the dismissal of the Social Democratic Chancellor and the appointment of Heinrich Brüning, leader of the Centre Party, in his place.

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Brüning had thin lips, a slender nose, keen eyes, the appearance of an intellectual; he was a devout Catholic with a strong spirit of self-sacrifice; he had certainly considerable gifts and great courage. Add finally the faintly sycophantic obeisance which a German ex-gunner felt towards the old Marshal. Hindenburg liked him, and was gratified when Brüning expressed his willingness to govern by decree if the Reichstag should prove difficult. Schleicher was satisfied with his *protégé*. He wanted a puppet to keep the place warm for him, and Brüning, it seemed, would do the task intelligently and with a suitable defiance of democratic forms. This was the end, therefore, of the Weimar Republic. It went almost unnoticed and certainly unwept among those around the old President who were under oath to uphold it. The issue now was in what guise German militarism would ride to new power. Schleicher believed he had the reins firmly in his hands. In the old pre-War days of the Kaiser there had been a Prussian dictum which ran, "First there is the All-Highest, then the cavalry officer, and then the cavalry officer's horse. After that there is nothing, and after nothing the infantry officer." General Schleicher's wit contrived a revised version. "First," he said, "there is the All-Highest, then myself, and then my horse, and after my horse the Army. After the Army there is nothing, and after nothing the Reichstag." Heinrich Brüning had been hired for the rôle of General Schleicher's horse.

However, the plan did not work precisely according to Schleicher's design. In his intrigue for the dictatorship of Germany he had two chief assets. He could twist the President to suit his whim. He had command over the Reichswehr, the one force in Germany whose influence had remained solid and enduring through all the vagaries of politics. In March 1930 he was justified in supposing that no other assets could count against these two. The Left Wing parties were discredited by failure and divided in such a manner that the Communists and

Socialists each cancelled out the influence of the other. The Right Wing parties, including Adolf Hitler's Nazi conglomeration, preached a gospel which accorded for the most part with the Reichswehr's hopes; they were often dependent on actual Reichswehr support, or at least on the soldiers' refusal to fire in a riot. Schleicher believed that he had only to cling tight to his two chief reins in order at last to assemble almighty power in his hold. Yet as the year went on he had momentary doubts. Something more convulsive was at work in the streets outside his window than he had fully grasped. In August 1930, for instance, a sensational trial had taken place at Leipzig at which three army officers were accused of association with the Nazis. Adolf Hitler appeared in the witness-box, swearing to high heaven that he had no wish to penetrate the Reichswehr and no intention of breaking the law. Instead, he flung legal defiance in the face of the Army leaders, and shouted that he would soon win victory at the polls. A few days later at the Reichstag elections he raised his total poll from 800,000 to 6½ millions, and gained 107 seats in the Reichstag, thus constituting his party the second strongest in the land. Perhaps, after all, thought Schleicher, something more was needed than Reichswehr guns and the President's prestige to conquer the German people. Perhaps other of his officers, like the three soldiers at Leipzig, would not fire on the mob if Nazis were arrayed against them. He decided he must muzzle the bite of this new monster and harness it if he could with the other beasts he sought to drive as supreme charioteer. And just at the moment when he made this critical decision he was lucky enough to discover a leader among the Nazis, a soldier, who spoke his language and was ready to talk. Captain Ernst Roehm, chief of Hitler's Storm Troops, knew that the Nazis needed the aid of the Reichswehr as much, probably more, than the Reichswehr needed the connivance of the Nazis. The stage was set for a deal.

Captain Roehm was the most notable figure in the

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Nazi movement after Hitler himself. He represented the tough, vagabond element which Hitler used to terrorize the back alleys of Munich, parade the streets, organize his meetings, and display before the gaping eyes of weak, vacillating onlookers the spectacle of masterful and ruffian force. All these characteristics were fittingly portrayed in Roehm's bull neck, his stumpy, tough body, his hard, scarred face. But at the same time he was much more than a conventional bruiser. He was a brave and brilliant soldier. In the first days of the War he had had the upper half of his nose shot away, yet no wound could keep him long in hospital. He was most at home in the sound of gun-fire, and in the subsequent years he fought with great distinction on several fronts where the battle was hottest. Like his Fuehrer, he was overwhelmed by Germany's defeat. From the day of armistice his one aim was to build a new army capable sooner or later of inflicting revenge on France. He set to work on the job in Munich in 1919. Under General von Epp he marched into the city with Reichswehr guns and pulverized the Red soviet which had seized momentary power. From that day he sought to accumulate a store of munitions in the army barracks; with these he trained his legions and overawed the streets. By night, too, he roamed the city, searching for recruits amid the little bands of desperate men who talked politics, denouncing the Reds, outraged by Versailles. It was at one of these meetings that he met Adolf Hitler, and immediately he realized what use could be made of such tub-thumping talents. From that day forward Hitler could rely on money and recruits for his German Workers' Party supplied by Captain Roehm. As time passed the party grew. Soon Roehm officially left the Reichswehr to give his full energy to the Nazi cause. He had an immense admiration for Hitler's hold over the mob; apparently, also, a real personal affection. The two men, however, did not always see eye to eye on policy. Roehm wanted a secret army trained for battle against foreign enemies; he was not

a politician, and could not understand Hitler's genius when he erected as the main target of attack not Versailles, but the "criminals and traitors" at home who had made Versailles possible. Because of this Hitler wanted a gang of thugs able to crack the skulls of his enemies in Munich; Roehm gave him what he wanted although he always dreamed of a soldier's battlefield rather than a politician's rough house. Despite their differences the two men worked well together. They raised the movement which Hitler grievously misled in his attempt to seize power in Munich in 1923. They were together again after the short spells of imprisonment which followed, Hitler talking on the rostrum, Roehm working on the streets. Together they provided the two elements which gave Nazi-ism its triumphs, brilliant demagoguery, and superb organization. Then suddenly they quarrelled. During the attempted conspiracy in Munich it was Ludendorff, the soldier, who had shown courage, and Hitler, the politician, who had run away. Roehm had noted the distinction, and although he was Hitler's friend he was no sycophant. "I know that many people," he wrote in his autobiography,

cannot bear advisers and warners; I always take the contrary standpoint. I was bound to Hitler by a sincere friendship; just because I saw that he was besieged by flatterers who worshipped him indiscriminately and did not venture a word of opposition, I felt it incumbent on me, as a true comrade, to speak frankly to my friend.

Therefore Roehm proposed that his Storm Troops should be organized in close association with the Reichswehr, and that Ludendorff's aid should be asked again to give a soldier's prestige to the movement. Hitler was furious. He rejected the proposal out of hand. Roehm wrote to Hitler resigning his office. "I take this opportunity," he said, "in remembrance of the beautiful and difficult hours we have lived through together, to thank you heartily for your comradeship and to beg you not to

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deprive me of your personal friendship." No answer came. Roehm was bitterly disappointed. He had found this man in the political gutter, recognized his talent, and set him on the road to success. He had sacrificed his position as a soldier, the life that he loved, to serve his movement. He had given him his street army. He had appreciated better than Hitler the essential importance of collaboration with the Reichswehr. But his idol would not listen; he had too many flunkys about him. Roehm was kicked out, and, with scarcely a penny in his pocket, with no sympathy from Hitler, indulging to the full his homosexual habit, he dragged out three miserable years in Munich until the chance came in 1928 to cross the Atlantic and become military attaché to the Bolivian Government. It was here in 1930 that he received an urgent message from the Fuehrer who had slighted and expelled him to return to Germany to take supreme command of the Storm Troops. Within twenty-four hours he had packed his bags. Back in Germany he was welcomed with Hitler's tears and repentance. Nothing was too good for him. When some protested against his immorality, when Hermann Goering revealed his jealousy of the new favourite, Hitler struck back in his defence. He knew his Storm Troopers were not "young ladies." He wanted "rough fighters," and Roehm was making them. By immense exertion and skill, flinging all his soldier's courage into his service of the cause, a trained street army of six hundred thousand men was raised in a year. In every town and city Roehm's men were marching, shouting their war-cries, singing their songs, breaking heads at public meetings, pummelling with knuckle-dusters in the streets outside, slashing with razor-blades when any dared to protest, giving the Nazi movement that resounding punch which settled so many victories at the polls. The man who achieved this mighty feat was possessed more even than Hitler himself by the daring, irresponsible fury which gave the Hitler movement its essential philosophy. "Europe, the whole

world," said Roehm, "can go up in flames. We don't care!" He wanted only to see Germany once again girded with unbreakable ramparts of steel, holding in its hand huge weapons of destruction, and ready, if need be, like some maniac Samson, to encompass her own ruin in the wreckage of civilization. But Roehm added to this consuming fury a knowledge that, if Germany were ever to regain such barbarian capacities, the politicians must not come into conflict with the Army. He knew that Nazi-ism must have the Reichswehr for its ally. He was eager to talk with General von Schleicher.

This, therefore, was the situation in Germany in 1931. Heinrich Brüning was governing by decree with Hindenburg's approval, struggling vainly to grapple with the mounting unemployment figures. Hitler was touring the country, first in his Mercédès car, next by aeroplane, rousing the hysterical bay of the mob, and in the intervals between his meetings conducting negotiations with the leaders of German industry. Another Nazi orator, called Gregor Strasser, hardly less proficient than Hitler himself, was rousing Berlin as Hitler had won Munich, preaching a more Socialist brand of National Socialism than ever Hitler had dared. Captain Roehm was drilling his men, and occasionally staging successful riot. General Schleicher, with the President and the Reichswehr already within his command, was now seeking to gain a third ally to support his silent, unhurried schemes for the assertion of his own dictatorship. With this aim he arranged through Roehm a meeting between Hindenburg and Hitler. It ended in disaster, for Hitler talked to the old man as if he were in his Munich beer-hall. Hindenburg swore when the Nazi leader left that he would never make this man a Minister. "Never more than a post-man," he stuttered in the quiet after the storm.

Roehm was disappointed at this first failure, but he set to work again with Schleicher to repair the lapse. Schleicher was disappointed too. And when in March 1932 Hitler challenged Hindenburg for the Presidency

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and gained thirteen million votes despite his defeat, the General began to realize the danger of allowing Brüning and Hindenburg to alienate this growing power irrevocably from the Army. Brüning was in favour of suppressing the Storm Troops. Schleicher stood fast against such folly. When the proposition was put to him he stormed out of the Chancellery in a rage. Back in his Reichswehr office he began to see daylight through the political maze. He would oust Brüning from Hindenburg's favour. That could be done easily enough by telling the crusty old reactionary (what was the truth) that Brüning had dangerous plans for economic salvage in Prussia by attacking the big landowners. At the same time he would talk to Captain Roehm and suggest to him that he should back a new candidate for Chancellor who would end any talk of the suppression of the Storm Troops. Schleicher himself would control the new Chancellor as he had helped to control Brüning.

It was a fine plan and it worked. Roehm bargained for a promise of an early dissolution of the Reichstag whereby Hitler could gain fresh support at the polls. Schleicher agreed, and on a May night in 1932 Hitler and Roehm met Schleicher and Oskar von Hindenburg at Schleicher's house. The deal was fixed. A few days later Hindenburg acquiesced in the betrayal of Brüning. Hitler went to see Schleicher to celebrate the triumph, and as he left announced jubilantly that a tablet should be erected to mark such a memorable occasion. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that the compact was "a master-stroke." Roehm was delirious; after ten years' effort, and after having risked so much to brave the wrath of his Fuehrer, he had secured the decisive alliance between the Reichswehr and the Nazis. But Schleicher was equally pleased; he had made Hindenburg bow to his demand once more; he had an agreement with the men who spoke for great masses in the country, the only power that could dispute the supremacy of the Reichswehr; he had, finally, a Chancellor of his own choice.



So all parties to the bargain were satisfied, and all were crooks. Who was going to double-cross first and most successfully? Perhaps the answer to that question depended on the Chancellor whom both Hitler and Schleicher regarded as their prisoner. His name was Franz von Papen, and he succeeded in introducing a note of farce into the German tragedy.

Schleicher had picked this man for the task because he believed that his skull was uniquely constructed of solid bone. It was not an unjustifiable assumption, for all his previous achievements could point to no other conclusion. He was the son of a Westphalian aristocrat, and had first emerged from obscurity as an unoffending, amiable Army officer appointed as military attaché to the German Embassy in Washington before the Great War. He was no politician. Politics, indeed, were barred by his military upbringing. He was merely a nice person with nice manners, one of the "dancing attachés" who graced Washington's ballrooms. Then suddenly, within a year, all America was talking about him. He was entrusted with the task of taking charge of Germany's intelligence service in the United States and of organizing German espionage over a whole continent. But intelligence was never reckoned as one of von Papen's qualities. He was suspected. He was held responsible for the destruction of munition stores, for passport frauds, for sabotage against ships in neutral ports. At last he was implicated in a conspiracy to blow up the Welland Canal. A jury found him guilty. He was expelled. A few days later a neutral ship sailed into Falmouth harbour. It was boarded by British authorities. To their astonishment they discovered not merely the German intelligence officer, but all his incriminating papers neatly folded in his pocket. The papers went to Whitehall; the unhappy von Papen back to Germany. Two years later he was given the chance to retrieve his reputation. He became Chief of Staff to the Fourth Turkish Army in Syria, where already Allenby's armies were sweeping the Turks and their

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German advisers back towards the Bosphorus. Von Papen escaped, but not before he had let a trunk full of papers and dispatches fall into the enemy's hands. All this was certainly not an auspicious start to a diplomatic career, and von Papen seemed aware of the fact. For the next fourteen years he lay low and said nothing. Charming manners, his aristocratic upbringing, and a good marriage into a wealthy family alone saved him from complete oblivion. Now he was to be called upon to discharge a task which might have baffled a Machiavelli. Indeed, when the morning papers of May 31, 1932, announced that Hindenburg was considering his appointment as Chancellor all Germany sat back and laughed. It was a rich joke. German politics, it was true, were in a pitiful state, but the *Berliner Tageblatt* voiced the opinion of the nation when it "considered such a facetious solution of the problem impossible." That night the grin was off their faces. The appointment was official. Between the scheming general at the Reichswehr and the gangster politician on the streets the scales were held by this blockheaded blunderer. Some time before his elevation he had written to a friend in Paris saying, "After Brüning the deluge." It had come.

Swiftly Germany rattled on along the road back to barbarism. German reaction was in the saddle; the only doubt concerned the name of the jockey. The new Chancellor was not as tame as Schleicher had hoped. "The unprecedented spiritual and material situation of the German people," he said in his first speech, "demands the liberation of the Government from the fetters of party politics and partisan doctrines, and calls for the consolidation of all national forces for the rebirth of Germany and sacrifices from all classes." With that stirring battle-cry the allowances of the unemployed were swiped, and the Junkers and Hindenburg acclaimed a man after their own heart. Hitler demanded the removal of the ban on the Storm Troops; he got what he wanted, and killings and brawlings increased as a prelude to the

coming elections. Papen's policy was clear; to crush the Left and connive at terror by the Right. Soon he struck openly. In Prussia a Socialist Government, which still had constitutional control over the police in that province, was engaged in a fierce tussle with the Junker landowners on the issue of agrarian reform. On the 20th of July Papen summoned Kark Severing, the Social Democratic leader, and announced that he was to be removed from his office for "reasons of State." Martial law was established in Prussia, and the only comment from the Left seemed to be Severing's remark as he left the room. "From this moment," he said musingly, "world history will be made." The Communists called for a general strike, but Severing and his colleagues preferred to wait for the coming election. It came ten days later, and revealed how quickly Papen had served the cause of the Nazis. By new rioting on the streets, inspired oratory on the platform, new riches in his coffers, Hitler secured 230 seats in the Reichstag. Three years of slump had forged his party stronger than any single block among his enemies. Surely now, after fourteen years of struggle, he was on the brink of power. Roehm, Goering, Goebbels, Hitler himself, believed as much. But they had reckoned without one man. General von Schleicher had been not a little disconcerted by the headstrong behaviour of Papen. Yet he still believed in his own star. He had a contempt for party politics, born of thirteen years of association with the Weimar enthusiasts. He believed he could continue to dance the marionettes from his office in the Reichswehr. Hitler clearly hoped that he would be called upon by Hindenburg to form a Government. But Schleicher knew the old man's aversion for "the Bohemian corporal." He still hoped to strike a bargain with the Nazis by overruling Hindenburg's objections to Hitler and his gang. Even if that failed he would not be lost. Politics, he believed, consisted solely of backstairs intrigue. And at that he could still beat any man in Germany.

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Under Schleicher's pressure Hindenburg was persuaded again to meet Hitler. The Bohemian corporal was this time less aggressive in the presence of the Field-Marshal, despite his great victory at the polls. He fumbled with the doorknob, tripped over the rug as he entered, and then started to talk somewhat shyly. Hindenburg shut him up, and asked whether he was prepared to take part in Papen's "National Government." Hitler replied that he wanted to be Chancellor, but only with the same powers as Mussolini had possessed after his march on Rome. Hindenburg waved his crutch in the air, announced that he would not give power to one party, refused to budge from his offer, and finished with a recommendation that if Hitler refused the chance he should at least conduct his opposition like a gentleman. The Fuehrer was outside on the mat. The interview had lasted no more than fifteen minutes. He had just scored the biggest triumph of his life at the polls. He had got nothing for it. He could not contain his anger.

Those few minutes with Hindenburg seemed to mark the peak of Nazi fortune. In fierce anger they voted out von Papen, but when the Reichstag dissolved the Nazi vote dropped by two million. The party began to split. Storm Troopers went to the Jewish newspapers and sold party secrets. Gregor Strasser, the most influential of Hitler's subordinates, broke from his Fuehrer because he had refused a compromise solution suggested by Schleicher. The Reichswehr was offended. Hindenburg was outraged. Money was running short. Hitler himself told Goebbels that he had a gun ready to end his own life. For ten years the Nazi Party had struggled against adversity. For three years they had gained easy and spectacular triumphs. A month earlier they had assailed the most dizzy height. Now they had crashed in the hour of conquest. Schleicher had won. At last he stepped out into the open from his antechamber and was installed as Chancellor. How wise he had been in never risking

the Reichswehr and his own neck in cleaning up the Storm Troops. They were cleaning up themselves. Within a few days of his accession the nations of the world assembled at Geneva approved in principle the right of Germany to equality in armaments. Schleicher himself proclaimed an amnesty for political prisoners, sought to negotiate with the trade unions, and set to work to prepare an economic programme. He would now rule Germany. He had helped kill the Red revolution after the War. He had torpedoed the Weimar Republic. He had outmanœuvred the Nazis. Henceforth none could question his authority.

This was the dream of a man who forgot that revolutions are made not in palaces, but in the streets. Germany was still racked by hunger, and the unemployment total had risen to seven millions. All the forces making for social convulsion were still driving Germany towards final crisis. Only Schleicher believed that intrigue could check the avalanche. The other old soldiers of Prussia, together with the rich men of Germany who paid their wages and manufactured their arms, were all quaking at the knees. If Hitlerism sank who would capture the masses? These men discovered that they feared the Nazi decline more than Nazi-ism itself. Hitler was a liar, a hooligan, a barbarian. But with it all he had one merit. He paid his thugs with rich men's silver, and had pledged them in return that he would not strip them of their gold. In that hour, therefore, capitalism was presented bereft of all its camouflage. Sometimes it plumes itself before the gaze of mankind in the garb of culture, freedom, religion, and civilization itself. Now German capitalism was seized with an almost paralytic fear as it watched the waning fortune of the man whom its leaders had previously denounced as the enemy of culture, the enemy of freedom, and the enemy of God. Hindenburg certainly had made his opinion clear. All these were now exposed as mere trimmings. Property was the core. This possession Hitler alone could certainly save, for he

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alone could substitute for solid political hopes in the minds of the masses romantic dreams. "A sinking pilot," said Carlyle, "will fling out all things, his very biscuit bags, lead, log, compass, and quadrant, before flinging out himself." German capitalism threw out decency, self-respect, good manners, all the best traditions of the German nation, in order to save the essential business of money-making. Hitler was too good a protector to be lost. He had to be rescued from the consequences of his own folly. The man charged to lead the rescue party was fittingly picked. The job was given to Herr von Papen, famed in half a dozen Chancelleries for his good breeding and delightful manners. It was the gentlemen of Germany who saved Hitler, which may explain the admiration which Hitler gained among the gentlemen of other lands during the subsequent six years, despite his humble birth and guttersnipe behaviour.

The plot was contrived between von Papen, Hindenburg, and his son Oskar. Von Papen had never lost the affection of Hindenburg, despite his dismissal from office. The President had even given him a signed photograph with the words "I had a comrade" scrawled across it. Von Papen now set to work to oust Schleicher from favour and instal himself more firmly. Most important of all, he opened secret negotiations with the downcast Hitler. They met quietly and without any ceremony at the house of a banker in Cologne. Von Papen brought the promise of new subscriptions from the big industrialists to refill the Nazi coffers. He hoped to gain in return Nazi support to overthrow the Schleicher rule, and establish in its place a Government part Nazi, but really his. It would be necessary to overrule the President's hatred of Hitler. This would not be impossible if he could curb for a moment the activities of the Storm Troops, and suggest to the old man that if he did not take the Nazis worse would come. The plot, in any case, was considerably aided by the fact that Schleicher was ranging himself against the Prussian landowners, who

had caused a scandal by transferring huge funds into their own pockets in the name of agrarian reform. All this Papen unfolded to Hitler. Hitler in turn clutched at the chance. The bargain was sealed. A few days later Schleicher got wind of the deal and reproached Papen for his treachery. "Kurt," replied the man whose intelligence Schleicher had truly assessed, but whose duplicity he had underrated, "in the name of our old friendship, and on my word of honour as an officer and as a man, I swear to you that I will never undertake nor sanction any move whatever against you or a Government of which you are the head." Schleicher believed him. Less than a month later he was summoned to Hindenburg's presence, upbraided for his opposition to the Prussian landowners, and dismissed from office. As he went out of one door von Papen came in at the other. Schleicher had been beaten at his own game of labyrinthine intrigue. "Von Papen," he said later, "proved to be the kind of traitor beside whom Judas Iscariot is a saint."

Schleicher had lost, despite all his scheming, because he failed to understand the struggle which was engulfing his country. A nation born to suffering at Versailles was now ravaged by slump. It had two choices. It could turn, as Lenin had done when he was left with a country torn by war and ruin, to fight the enemy within the gates, the heirs of Stinnes who made profits from their people's distress, and to build solid comforts for the men, women, and children in the broken homes of Germany. The other choice, needing so much less toil and resolution, so much more safety for the rich, was to enable Germany to satisfy her thwarted longings to the sound of barbaric drums in hate and persecution and eventual war. To follow this choice Hitler was necessary; his party alone knew how voraciously a people could feed on illusions. The meaning, therefore, of these last three years in Germany was that one by one her rich and powerful men made their choice. They preferred barbarism to the least tampering with their privileges. They joined Hitler

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not in revulsion against revolution on the Left, for that had never happened; they joined rather in a counter-revolution against a reformism that was all too feeble. One by one they went over. Thyssen, the steel king with the longest nose of all, had scented the truth as far back as 1927. Hugenberg, banker and industrialist, followed. They set the fashion. Hindenburg stood firm until almost the end; then he made obeisance. Von Papen changed his colour, not through Machiavellian design, but with the unerring instinct of a chameleon. Poor Schleicher alone was left, cleverer than the rest, yet deluded by his cleverness into the belief that there was some middle ground for subtle compromise between resistance and submission. He was the first real apostle of the policy of appeasement towards the Nazis. For he had made the compact with Captain Roehm in 1930 which enabled the Storm Troops to march and bluster and pillage and kill without the intervention of the Reichswehr. Now, two days after his own dismissal from office, he was able to see the result of his handiwork. Von Papen brought Hitler to Hindenburg, and a Government was formed in which Hitler was Chancellor and von Papen his lieutenant. That night, the night of the 30th of January, a great torchlight procession filed past the Reich Chancellery, with Hindenburg standing at one window and Hitler at the other. Captain Roehm greeted his Fuehrer and shed tears on his shoulder. "It was like a dream," wrote Goebbels in his diary. Hindenburg's display of emotion was no less remarkable. "And now, gentlemen," he said, with pious irrelevance, "forward with God!"

Exactly twenty-eight days later a twenty-four-year-old Dutchman with bad eyesight and a stupid laugh achieved a prodigy of ingenuity at which the world will never cease to marvel. He found himself with a packet of fire-lighters for eighteen minutes inside the German Reichstag in Berlin, a building—in fact, a capital—which he had never visited before in his life. He set fire to his



shirt, then to an old tablecloth, then to his coat, and finally to a leather sofa. The success of his unusual enterprise was considerably aided by inflammable liquid poured over the furniture and a great explosion of gas. Flames lit up the Berlin sky, and eight minutes later, pushing through the gathering crowd outside, came the new Minister of the Interior, General Goering. "It is a Communist outrage," he said. "It is a sign from heaven," said Hitler now arriving at his side. Next morning Hindenburg agreed to the suspension of civil liberties. Germany had its chance to give a verdict at the polls. Terror ruled the land. And on the 23rd of March the new Reichstag was presented with a Bill conferring on Hitler dictatorial powers. Storm Troops with pistols in their belts lined the members' benches. Hitler himself shouted, "Choose between peace and war." From that day he was the master of Germany, scheming, struggling, for the mastery of Europe.

There was still the little matter of the Reichstag fire. The chief offender was a Bulgarian Communist who had been in Munich at the time. He was George Dimitrov. "You want a political trial?" he jeered. "By God, you shall have none!" It was the last voice of a free man which Europe has heard out of Germany for seven years.

All else was drowned in the noise of battery and murder. Skilled hooligans ranged like wild bisons through the streets, kicking their hoofs against one door in each street, racing up the stairs, hauling out their victims to special torture in the woods, and, worst of all, leaving in their tracks behind every window a cold sweat of terror. Professors of music and history and science were set to scrub pavements with the bones of their fingers. Bundles of books flamed in bonfires at the corners. Little children in the schools were fed on the pornography of Jew-baiter Streicher. A steady procession was frog-marched to the prisons. Stout sadists did their work with castor-oil and whips, or perhaps when brave flesh quivered and

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collapsed merely with the tough end of a boot. Thus Germany marched "forward with God." And, lest any should doubt what manner of men ruled in the land of Goethe, a special day was set apart to reveal in the sight of all mankind that the designers of this new technique of horror were bound by neither honour nor comradeship nor pledged word nor any other scruple. Captain Roehm, the man who had found Hitler, given him his legions, and made his alliance with the Reichswehr, was struck down in a Munich prison yard; the Fuehrer he had made and loved and followed spat on his grave and shrieked, "This animal!" General von Schleicher, the man who believed that the Nazis could be subdued by compacts and cunning, was thrown like a faggot on to the flames of the same bloody holocaust. Ironically in his case it was Hermann Goering, the supposed moderate, who gave the order. "Believe me," he grinned, "I did not use gloves."

On that night of June 30, 1934, Hitler murdered comradeship and Goering murdered appeasement. But still the statesmen of Europe would not learn. They fawned and grovelled and signed treaties with the monster until one by one they were threatened with the fate of Roehm or Schleicher. George Dimitrov, with the dungeons and torture appliances of Nazi-ism only five minutes from his courtroom, had shown them another way, but in their stupidity and cowardice they refused to follow his example. Had they, with the might of great nations behind them, displayed half his daring they might have forestalled a world of blood. They preferred the course of pusillanimity, and we to-day have to suffer for their monumental crime.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MISFORTUNES OF FRANCE

He [Genseric the Vandal] subscribed a solemn treaty with the hope of deriving some advantage from the term of its continuance and the moment of his violation.

EDWARD GIBBON, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

ONE statesman alone understood in a flash during those spring days of 1933 that the Nazi colossus would shake the fabric of Europe. He raised his fist ready to strike.

For years the Polish Corridor, slicing East Prussia from the mainland of Germany, had been counted as the sorest grievance which she inherited from Versailles. On a thousand platforms Hitler himself had denounced the monstrosity, invoking the blessed name of self-determination, despite the fact that the territory was inhabited overwhelmingly by Poles and that German landowners had been responsible for increasing the Polish predominance by hiring Poles to undercut German wage levels. Now, a few days before the Reichstag went up in flames Hitler, with the new authority which the title of Chancellor bestowed upon him, re-echoed the demand of his campaigning days. "The Corridor must be restored to Germany." Within a few hours an icy reply came back from Poland from the lips of the Polish Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck. "Frontiers," he said, "are not changed by words." Hitler was uncowed. Five days after the fire he flew over Poland to East Prussia. His flight gave fresh intensity to the rapidly rising fury of the Nazis in Danzig. It was feared that at any moment they would break loose and seize the Polish munition stores in the harbour.

Josef Pilsudski, dictator of Poland, was prepared to smite before he was smitten. He had watched closely

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the rise of the new militarism in Germany. From the days of Versailles his country had been tied in close alliance with France; it was France who had enabled him to throw back the Bolsheviks from the gates of Warsaw in 1920, France who had sought to maintain Poland as a bolster against a rejuvenated Germany. Yet Pilsudski was shrewd. He had seen that after Locarno Germany had renounced any claim to Alsace-Lorraine, but not to the Corridor. Now Germany was renewing her strength, and down in Rome Ramsay MacDonald was talking about "treaty revision" with Mussolini. This was, perhaps, the crucial moment; a few more months and the issue of Poland's frontiers might be raised at the council tables to satisfy Germany's appetite. Pilsudski determined to act. On the 21st of April tanks, artillery, aeroplanes, and thirty-five thousand men staged a giant parade through the streets of Vilna. The Polish Minister quietly called at the Wilhelmstrasse for an explanation of Germany's intentions. In Warsaw itself the French Ambassador was sent scurrying to the telephone; if Pilsudski marched would France march with him? Hitler, meanwhile, fearful of the threat which he had raised, summoned to his presence the Soviet Ambassador, a Jew, and re-signed the treaty of friendship with the Soviets which three previous German Governments had not troubled to renew. Then at last the answer came through from M. Daladier, Prime Minister of France. His country would *not* march. Hitler breathed again.

Now in precious, vital hours of decision Josef Pilsudski groped his way to the belief that if Poland could not have Germany for an enemy she must have Germany for a friend. And while he pondered Hitler dealt the first unerring stroke of his diplomatic career. He grasped the chance of a separate peace with Poland. On the 17th of May he announced to the Reichstag that Germany desired "peacefully to regulate all awkward questions with other nations." On the 3rd of July his spokesman in Danzig proclaimed that the Versailles

treaty was "the Magna Charta of the rights and liberties of the Free City." On the 15th of November Hitler received the Polish Minister, and both expressed their satisfaction that in future all differences between them were to be settled amicably by the process of direct negotiations. And in January 1934 the final triumph was consummated. "A written agreement has been made in Berlin," said the *communiqué*,

between Germany and Poland which by applying the principles of the Kellogg Pact lays down the following: Both Governments desire to settle by direct negotiation all questions of whatever nature which concern them. In the case of disputes which cannot be solved by direct negotiation a solution shall be sought by other means, without prejudice to other methods such as are laid down in the existing agreements. In no case shall there be an appeal to force.

In which camp was Poland now? That question would torture French statesmen right down to September 1938. For twelve years France had toiled to raise her mighty edifice of eastern alliance. Brick had been laid on brick, mortared by French finance, French munitions, and French military advisers. Now at the first jolt of the Nazi eruption the cornerstone had loosened. And the measure of the peril which confronted Europe was shown in the fact that even Pilsudski was deceived. By this treaty Poland was to be fed and fattened by the Nazi hand for the day of slaughter.

## II

And, though circuitous and obscure,  
The feet of Nemesis how sure !

SIR WILLIAM WATSON

"I have made certain that Chancellor Dollfuss is with us. To-morrow we shall set to work to make a clean job of things in Austria." These words were spoken in Vienna on the night of February 11, 1934. The speaker was Major Fey, leader of the Austrian Fascist organization, the Heimwehr.

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Morning came, cold and misty. At half-past ten there was a telephone call put through for the Chancellor; a few leaders of the Social Democratic party of Vienna (representing three out of four of all the electors in the city) wanted to speak to him urgently. The Chancellor was very sorry. He had not the time; he had an appointment at St Stephen's Cathedral to attend Mass in honour of the Pope's anniversary. So while Chancellor Dollfuss prayed the cleaning up began. Just after twelve some electric tramways stopped in the centre of the city. The Government hastily announced that this had been the signal for a general strike. In the early afternoon martial law was proclaimed. Soon Major Fey and his followers, with the aid of the police and the Army, had "set to work." And that same evening Chancellor Dollfuss turned his mind from piety to politics. "These Socialists [there were 1,400,000 of them, and in the previous ten years they had gained fame chiefly by the building of sixty thousand model working-class flats]—these Socialists are hyenas," he said, "who must be hunted out of the country."

For three days the hunt went on. Machine-guns battered the great working-class tenements; huge holes were rent in the walls; troops stormed in at the doors. No word of pity came from the Chancellery; on the second day the Chancellor was taking tea with the Papal Nuncio. By the evening of the third the business was finished. The Social Democrats, caught off their guard, were overwhelmed by the power of hard weapons imported into the city through previous days. Yet they fought gallantly, and when the end came half Vienna was desolate. The streets were littered with the *débris* of fallen barricades, broken glass, and human bodies. Across all was a smear of blood. It was indeed a strange ruin. Dr Engelbert Dollfuss, Chancellor of Austria, the smiling defender of Austrian independence, acclaimed throughout the world for the courage with which he stood fast against the new dictator in Germany, the hope

of the Vatican, the darling of the London twopenny Press, had just blasted to pieces half Vienna and the men who would die in its defence. "It was the saddest day in my life," he moped, when the leaders of the defeated were safely chased over the border or shackled in chains.

Dr Dollfuss was the illegitimate son of a smiling Austrian peasant girl and a handsome but irresponsible young woodcutter. The unhappy event took place on a feast-day of St Francis of Assisi, and the boy was named Engelbert after a sainted Archbishop of Cologne. The odour of sanctity surrounded him, if not from the day of his birth, at least from early childhood. This same aroma he carried with him through his successes at the university, his experience as a soldier in the War, and finally into the business of politics after it. He was less than five feet tall, but charming manners, a keen intellect, and persistent piety ensured that he never passed unnoticed. Austria in those days had been reduced to a state of six millions, two millions of whom lived in Vienna—an adult head with the body of a dwarf. The adult was always at war with the dwarf—for the countryside mostly held fast to Catholic tradition, while the city was ruled by Socialists who looked to the future, hoping by an effort of social reform to bring better life and health to the young. The city was anti-clerical. It taxed the rich to pay for its revolution. And for these crimes it had to wage unending political battle against the private militia known as the Heimwehr, which had the backing of the Catholics, who feared for their religion, and the backing of the rich, who feared for their profits. These, together with an incipient movement drawing its strength from its association with Nazi-ism across the border in Germany, were the conflicting parties in Austrian politics when Dr Dollfuss was summoned by the Austrian President to assume the Chancellorship in 1932. Before making his decision he spent the night in prayer in a little church on the outskirts of Vienna. Next morning he assumed the leadership of a Government in which the

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interests of God and mammon were nicely compounded by the support of the old Catholic parties and the introduction of the Heimwehr. One of the leaders of this last organization was a tough, unthinking soldier called Major Emil Fey. Another was Prince Ernst Starhemberg, who owned thirty-six castles, but preferred to spend his nights in the Vienna night clubs.

All these elements were assembled under the banner of the new movement which Dollfuss formed with the blessing of the bishops, known as the Fatherland Front. Yet all these were not enough to guard his *régime* against the growing disturbance caused by the Nazi followers of Adolf Hitler. Storm Troopers were parading the streets; Dollfuss banned their uniforms, and they appeared next day in dress clothes and top-hats. Bombs and explosives were smuggled across the frontier; Hitler, it was clear, had decided to gain Austria for the Reich by fraud or force. What had Dollfuss against such power? He had Austrian democracy, strong and proud in the tenement buildings of Vienna, but in the early days of his Government he had dismissed the Austrian Parliament and determined to govern by decree. He could still have gained the support of the Viennese Socialists; they were ready to stand fast against the Nazis, who would purloin even those diminished rights which Dollfuss had left them. Yet he dallied, and rejected an alliance with anti-clericalism. He preferred to rely on the untainted support of Fey and Starhemberg and the continued blessing of the Church. But not on these alone. His eyes turned towards Rome. And his pious hopes were fixed, not on the supplications of the Holy Father, but on the bayonets of the Duce.

Signor Mussolini had no particular love for Austria. In the days of the German Republic Austrians had been inclined to chide him for the rigour of his rule over Germans in the Southern Tyrol. "What is Austria—who is she?" he had asked rhetorically on one public occasion. "Austria," he answered, with his usual contempt for the



weak, "Austria is a spittoon." But now things were changing. A different Germany had arisen, and Mussolini knew no good reason why he should not suspect Hitler's ambitions against his homeland. Italy had no wish to see German troops on the Brenner Pass. Moreover, the acquisition of Austria by the Reich would drive a wedge into the Balkans, which Mussolini regarded as his own preserve. He was intimately concerned with Austrian independence, by which he meant that the country should be made dependent on him. When, therefore, Dollfuss came to Rome in April 1933 for the Easter ceremonies at the Vatican Mussolini was pleased to meet him. In June they holidayed together, and between bathes the acquaintance ripened to friendship. Dollfuss returned to Vienna with the conviction that his country could always rely on support from Rome as long as he accepted his new master's bidding. What those orders might be he may already have had some inkling. Mussolini, the ex-Socialist, hated Socialists anywhere at any time; he hated the Austrian Socialists in particular. He hated them not merely for the sake of auld lang syne, but chiefly because of their habit of exposing his ambitions in the Balkans and for their opposition to the scheme for making Austria an Italian protectorate. In particular, a Socialist mayor in Austria called Koloman Wallisch had exposed the business whereby Mussolini armed the Fascists in Hungary and Austria in defiance of the post-War treaties. This had caused an international scandal at the time and serious difficulties for both Mussolini and Dollfuss. Sooner or later, therefore, Mussolini would use his power over Dollfuss to seek his revenge. It came sooner rather than later. In January 1934 an Italian emissary brought a message from Rome to the "pocket Chancellor" in Vienna. A few days later the pro-Italian Heimwehr raided the Socialist headquarters in Linz. At this there was much dismay and confusion among the Viennese workers. Some suggested a general strike against the

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rising insolence of the Heimwehr and the subservience of Dollfuss. Meanwhile Fascist arms were assembled in the city. On the 11th of February Major Fey made his famous speech, and throughout the next three days his legions did their work. Koloman Wallisch was hunted down, captured amid the snows on the Yugoslav frontier, and done to death. Many others as brave as himself met the same fate. Dollfuss had done what he was told superbly. In return Mussolini was able to gain for him a joint declaration by England, France, and Italy of the "necessity to maintain the independence of Austria." Dollfuss, had in short, gambled away the hope of unity at home for support abroad; Rome, spiritual and temporal, had won what Vienna, Socialist and democratic, had lost. It was a poor exchange, for in those three days of battle Austria forfeited her last slender chance of independence. Now the German and Italian dictators eyed each other across the corpse from which the last breath of life had just been beaten.

The two men met for the first time a few weeks later at Venice. Hitler was a little overawed, for Mussolini wore all the uniforms and received all the cheers. None the less, he was able to talk volubly about nothing in particular according to his usual fashion, and they parted on friendly terms with not much business done. "A garrulous monk," was Mussolini's verdict, but still he believed he had got what he wanted—a promise to call off the Nazi terror in Austria. A few minutes after Hitler had boarded his train for Berlin Count Ciano interviewed the journalists. "You will see," he said, "nothing more will happen."

Forty days after that famous meeting Dollfuss was presiding over his Cabinet in the Ballhausplatz. Major Fey brought him news that 144 Nazis, disguised as Austrian soldiers, had collected in a near-by gymnasium. The Cabinet meeting broke up. Just after one o'clock the Nazis arrived in three huge lorries. They got out, passed the two men on the outside of the palace, and

rushed up the main staircase. The Chancellor was in the great drawing-room upstairs. It had five doors, built by Metternich for the Congress of 1815, so that five monarchs could enter at the same time. From these doors the terrorists converged. Two shots rang out. The Chancellor crumpled, with one bullet through his neck and the other through his spine. Two telephone calls were put through by the conspirators from the Chancellery that afternoon, one to the German legation, the second to a Viennese *café* where the other leaders of the revolt were supposed to be waiting for news. There was no answer to the second, and by seven that night the whole plot had collapsed in disorganization and chaos.

Next day the two dictators again glowered at each other over the mangled body of Dollfuss. Italian troops were on the march for the Brenner, and the Press in Rome seemed to fling down a challenge. "Only too often," wrote the *Messaggero*,

the promises of the German Government have not been kept. We will not negotiate on a footing of equality with people who fail thus cynically to respect the laws of honour. Any Government in the world to-day has the right to claim complete freedom of action in regard to Germany.

Berlin's answer to this threat of war was blank denial. True, there was the curious broadcast from Munich on the afternoon of the murder rejoicing over "the rise of the German people in Austria." The man responsible was dismissed. Berlin knew nothing, and the patriots who had risen in arms to bring Austria to the "Fatherland" would have to wait four years for a patriot's funeral. They shouted "Heil, Hitler!" at their trial. Dollfuss in his death agony had not the same defiance. "May God forgive them!" he said, in a last-minute intervention on behalf of the men who had murdered Austria's puppet Chancellor. There is no record that he made a similar plea on behalf of the Chancellor who had murdered the real Austria. Some there are who need no repentance.

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Poor tortured Austria! Versailles had ringed her round with prison walls of tariffs, condemning her to poverty, abject and pitiless. In the days of civilized Germany she sought escape in friendly commerce with her neighbour, but the heirs of Versailles said no. Still, through days of struggle and sorrow she raised a new Vienna, just tasting for a moment happiness and hope for the future. Slump and the machine-guns of Dollfuss cracked that prospect to oblivion. Now new agony threatened across the German frontier.

Independent Austria was another pillar in the edifice of French security. Nazi hands had been laid about her. She was shaken. She tottered. Only the prop across the Brenner saved her from falling.

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### III

On a sunny afternoon in the late autumn of 1933 a man, nameless to this day, walked into the Crédit Municipal bank in the Basque town of Bayonne, just across the Spanish frontier in France. He spoke to the clerk behind the counter, asking politely if he could be informed of the exact number of bonds issued by the Crédit Municipal, together with the exact amount of securities held against them. The clerk replied that he would have to call the manager. The manager, M. Gustave Tissier, was equally polite, although considerably shocked at the request. He replied that he had not the information available at once, but if the customer would call back in a few days he would be given the answer.

Back at his home M. Tissier spent a whole night in a sweat of fear. The Crédit Municipal was a kind of municipal pawnshop. M. Tissier had been appointed to the job by a big financier called Alexandre Stavisky, who seemed to be able to pull all the necessary political strings, but whose face was never seen in Bayonne. M. Tissier soon found the business stranger than any he had known before in his experience. The mayor of

the town sat on the board. Circulars were issued by persons whom M. Tissier had never instructed advising the purchase of *Crédit Municipal* bonds. Altogether he found that on the instructions of his chief he was issuing bonds far in excess of the securities on which they were supposed to be based. Worse still, M. Tissier had overcome the necessity of obtaining the signature of two responsible backers on the bonds themselves by persuading a colleague to sign blank forms. He was plunging deeper. The disproportion of bonds and securities was growing wider. Who was the financial Titan who thought he could play fast and loose with the laws of France? Would his hireling be left in the lurch? The unknown client who had come to the counter with his awkward question pulled up M. Tissier with a jerk. He decided to tell all to the police. Next day the *Bayonne Crédit Municipal* was closed to all comers. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Alexandre Stavisky. He was well known in high political and financial circles. Now he was not to be found.

Alexandre Stavisky was a Russian Jew, born in Kiev. When he was ten years old he left Russia with his father, who then set up as a dentist in Paris. From the earliest days of his manhood Alexandre dealt in gems and jewellery in the Paris underworld. He had a great attraction for women, and with one of them, richer than himself, he started a dance-hall. One day they quarrelled, and in a *café* near the Madeleine he drew a knife, slashed her across the cheek, leaving her disfigured for life, but afraid to call the police. Just after the War he picked up another woman, a young French actress who had been left a widow with a fine store of jewellery. He loved her and left her, taking the jewellery with him; but she was not so fearful as his first victim. She prosecuted him, and he was sentenced to thirteen months' imprisonment. It took a few years after such a setback to re-establish his fortune, but he was not dismayed. Soon he became known as a man who would spend like a millionaire throughout

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all the watering-places of France and Italy, until one day in 1926 he was caught in another swindle. He had a cheque on an American bank for 600 francs. He made it 46,000. His guilt seemed incontrovertible, but by some strange process the investigating magistrate lost the cheque. Fourteen times the case was postponed, and in the end the sentence was no more than eighteen months. Stavisky came out of prison again, and returned to the life of a monarch. Nothing could check his greed for money. Once he was suspected of forging Bank of England notes. In Deauville he was charged with playing with marked cards, but a threat to expose the owners of the casino enabled him to escape. He then became a big financial figure, with generals, diplomats, and politicians associated with his enterprise. In Hungary he started a scheme for buying up at rock-bottom prices the claims of dispossessed Hungarian squires and selling them at a fine profit. When this had failed he returned to France and set out on his last enterprise—the Bayonne pawnshop. For months all went well until that awful night when M. Tissier felt that it would be wiser to be hung for a lamb than a sheep. Stavisky knew that this was the end. Next morning all France would be on his heels. With a forged passport and a revolver in his pocket he left Paris in the hope of fleeing the country.

In those first days of January 1934 anger rose throughout the length and breadth of France. The Right Wing and Fascist Press had been conducting a campaign against the Government of M. Chautemps, which was then in power. They seized on this new chance and raised the cry, "Down with the robbers!" The Government was roundly accused of complicity in the scandal, for it was revealed that a charge of fraud had been outstanding against the swindler while he was on bail. M. Dalimier, a member of the Government, was actually accused of direct association with Stavisky in the Bayonne racket. For a week, therefore, temper was rising. The whole nation watched the search for the criminal. Hints were

made that the police had instructions not to find him. Suddenly on the 8th of January came a shock. The police had at last discovered Stavisky in a villa at Chamonix, on the Swiss frontier. But would the full truth ever be told? For Stavisky was found with a bullet through his head. The police called it suicide. Some called it murder by the police. Whatever the truth, the Chautemps Government could not stand the blast. Demonstrations were growing noisier in the streets. On the 27th of January Chautemps resigned. That night violent crowds rioted in the Grands Boulevards, breaking shop-windows, smashing *café* furniture, shouting "Down with the robbers!" M. Chiappe, the Prefect of Police, treated the rioters with amazing benevolence, no doubt because his sympathies were as Royalist and Fascist as those of the men who had made the din. M. Daladier, who now assumed the Premiership, felt compelled to dismiss M. Chiappe from his post. That act threw fresh oil on the fire. For, according to M. Daladier, his Prefect of Police thereupon flew into a fit of rage, and threatened himself to go down into the streets, not as a policeman, but a rebel. Meanwhile outside the storm was rising. A rumour flew through the city that Senegalese troops were being massed in Paris to shoot down any who dared raise their voice against the Government.

The tempest burst on the afternoon of February 6, 1934. A crowd massed in the Place de la Concorde, shouting slogans. Some stones were thrown at a police lorry. By six o'clock the crowd had swelled until a hundred thousand people were yelling, fighting, some of them slashing at the police horses with razor blades fixed on walking-sticks. Stones and pieces of old iron hurtled through the air. Soon came the crackle of fire, first from an overturned bus and next from the window of the Ministry of Marine. A surging, excited mass swayed towards the bridge, where a thin line of Guards stood between the rioters and their quarry, the Chamber of Deputies. The Guards were pelted with stone and iron

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until at last they could hold out no longer. Some of their horses stampeded back across the bridge. Another few seconds and the rioters might have followed in their wake. At that moment the police felt for their pistols. A volley split the air. Fifty people fell to the ground, six of them stone dead. The mob recoiled in preparation for another rush with the cry of "Assassins!" on their lips. They charged again. Six more fell dead. That was the end. Next morning the trade-union newspaper announced that "Fascism had, for the first time, shown its ugly face to France." M. Daladier announced his resignation. The Fascist Leagues were jubilant. They believed they had scored their first victory in the conquest of France. If riot in the streets could dictate that one Government should resign might it not install a dictator in power?

Yet, strangely, in those next six days another sound was heard along the boulevards. M. Chiappe had helped organize the riot on the 6th; but there were others who shouted, "To prison with M. Chiappe!" Through six days their cry became louder, until on the 12th of February a hundred thousand Socialists and Communists assembled at the Cours de Vincennes with banners which shouted, "Fascism shall not pass!" They were celebrating the general strike called by the trade unions with the purpose of showing that France's breed of Hitlerism had to reckon with this power before it could hope for triumph. Communists and Socialists were not on speaking terms in those days. But as the separate processions filed past one another the men raised their fists in comradely salute. At this hour the French Popular Front was born. Tough men from Belleville and Charonne and Ménilmontant saved France for freedom when her rulers quailed before a battle on the streets.

This was not the only consequence of the Stavisky affair. In the new Government formed after the February days a man assumed the control of French foreign affairs who understood precisely the significance for France of the rise of Hitler in Germany, the defection of Pilsudski,



and the murder of Dollfuss. He was Louis Barthou, seventy-two years old, still vigorous, cultured, and with the courage of a lion. He believed that France's eastern edifice of alliance must be rebuilt before it crumbled further. He toured the capitals of Eastern Europe with considerable success. And he believed that this friendship for France in the east must be buttressed with the might of Russia. To that end he worked to swing the Soviets from their traditional policy of accord with Germany. This principle had guided Soviet diplomacy since the Rapallo Treaty of 1922. In 1933, after Hitler came to power, they still held to it. But their suspicions were growing. They knew that Hitler was the disciple of Ludendorff, and that in his *Mein Kampf* he had extolled the benefits of a German empire in the Ukraine. At the World Economic Conference in London in 1933 Hitler's emissary, Hugenberg, had even blurted out the truth. Moscow was discomfited, and her doubts grew when Pilsudski, the old enemy of Russia, made his pact with Germany, and when Hitler himself pointedly refused to bestow a joint Soviet-German guarantee on the Baltic states. Moscow was ready for a change in policy, and Louis Barthou had the skill and insight to seize the opportunity with both hands. He negotiated for a Franco-Soviet pact, and it was by his effort that Russia was brought to Geneva. This was, indeed, perhaps the most momentous event in Europe since Versailles. A great nation which for fifteen years had been treated as a pariah was now brought into the family of nations. A people of a hundred and eighty millions, growing each year in economic strength, holding authority in Asia as in Europe, able to place in the field a huge force of arms, was pronouncing its willingness to use its might in the cause of ensuring peace. Here was an influence which could outweigh the disrupting force of Hitlerism. Just at the moment, therefore, when Europe was troubled by the new terror it was offered the means to restore the balance. But among all the governing statesmen in England and

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France only Louis Barthou understood. And for him a special fate was prepared.

On the 9th of October he travelled to Marseilles to receive King Alexander of Yugoslavia, whom he had invited to pay a visit to France. He received the monarch at the dock, showed him to an open car, and took his seat beside him. They drove through the streets amid cheering crowds. Suddenly a man sprang out from the pavement past the guards on to the running-board of the car. Within a few seconds he had emptied his revolver into the King and his companion. The murderer was a Macedonian terrorist, who had connexions with a Croatian terrorist organization, which in turn had its literature printed in Germany at the behest of its friends in high places in Berlin. King Alexander paid for his failure to dispense fair treatment to his Croat subjects. Louis Barthou paid for his courage in defying the Nazi Moloch. His policy died with him. For with the passing of a giant the pigmies resumed their sway.

### IV

"The chronicles of his [Thiers's] public life is the record of the misfortunes of France."

KARL MARX, *Civil War in France*

M. Pierre Laval returned to Paris in triumph on the night of January 9, 1935. He was an impressive figure, faintly negroid in feature, sallow-skinned, thick-lipped, dark-eyed. Some one once described him as "a seedy waiter," but it was unfair. He had cunning, considerable charm, and the resource which had raised him from a butcher's errand-boy to become Premier of France. Now he was jubilant. He had just scored, as he believed, a great diplomatic victory.

He had been to Rome to see Mussolini. Solid friendship with Italy, he believed, would be worth all the alliances which previous French statesmen had built up in Eastern Europe; for that reason he dropped Barthou's plan for an eastern Locarno, and was ready to

delay further negotiation with Moscow. He had got what he wanted. Great honour had been paid him in the Italian capital; had he not been closeted for hours alone with the Italian dictator in the Palazzo Farnese after an official banquet? And had he not come away with a firm contract in his hand? In exchange for a strip of territory in French Somaliland (Mussolini had charmingly described himself as a "collector of deserts") there were to be consultations about Austria and an assurance that Italy would give diplomatic aid to France in the face of further provocations from Germany. There had been hints, of course, that Mussolini was preparing some adventure in Africa. M. Laval was not dismayed. Some one even reminded him that Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations. "Good God!" he cried. "Is it really?"

For a few weeks after that journey to Rome M. Laval was a big success. France welcomed his agreement with Italy. She sighed with relief when the Saar plebiscite (Hitler's "last territorial claim") passed off without convulsion. True, there was some disturbance caused by the German announcement of conscription in March. But against that M. Laval was able to set the happy accord of the Versailles Powers at Stresa. That, indeed, was a notable occasion. The rulers of France, Britain, and Italy had met together in the Hall of Music of the Baromeo Palace on Isola Bella, just off the shores of Lake Maggiore. Here they had shown, according to Mr Ramsay MacDonald, "the greatest unity of purpose." They had denounced Germany for her unilateral breach of the Versailles treaty. ("I don't like to call it a warning," said Mr MacDonald, "but we have expressed our regrets.") They had reaffirmed their interest in the maintenance of Austrian independence. They had shown what could be done by great statesmen meeting in a spirit of goodwill. Every one, indeed, was satisfied—even Hitler. Mr MacDonald came home on one of his infrequent visits to England; he had scored at another

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great world conference. M. Laval basked in his triumph; he had an ally across the Alps, another across the Channel, and across the Rhine a Germany, quiet, rearming no doubt, but pitifully weak in weapons compared with his great Triple Alliance. Mussolini was satisfied too. The resolution to which he had put his name condemned "any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the *peace of Europe*." His troops were in full battle dress in *Africa*—two hundred thousand of them—so he had no cause to worry. Strangely, this contradiction had occurred to some others, but Mr MacDonald knew all the answers. "And did you discuss Abyssinia with Mussolini?" he was asked. Mr MacDonald gaped in astonishment. "My friend," he said, "your question is irrelevant." Neither M. Laval nor Signor Mussolini himself could have put the point more concisely.

A few weeks later in Paris a low murmur began to disturb M. Laval's serenity. It was not the noise of troops drilling on the frontiers of Abyssinia; he had an inkling that that might happen. It was something much more terrifying, the clamour of politicians in England—and France too—who held the curious view that law in Africa should conform to law in Europe, and that the perorations he and Mr MacDonald had made at Stresa on the subject of the sanctity of treaties were so convincing that they should be applied even in defence of the Emperor of Abyssinia and his unarmed tribesmen. M. Laval could not assent to so daring a paradox; nor was he unduly disturbed. He and Sir John Simon saw eye to eye, and together they managed to deal with the Abyssinian irrelevancy not on the basis of the Covenant of the League of Nations, but by private committee. Undoubtedly the pressure in England to check any adventure in Africa was becoming formidable, but looking after that was not M. Laval's affair. He left the job with some confidence to Sir Samuel Hoare, who succeeded Sir John Simon as Foreign Secretary, and Mr Baldwin, who succeeded Mr MacDonald as Premier. M. Laval

still had good hopes that Mussolini, if he were really determined, could invade Abyssinia without inflicting casualties on anybody but the Abyssinians. Then suddenly out of a still fairly blue sky came a thunderbolt. Britain was to sign in a few hours' time a treaty with Germany driving another coach-load through the structure of Versailles.

Strangely, the man who had launched the thunderbolt was the same Sir John Simon in whom both the Japanese and M. Laval had felt so much confidence. Sir John had watched the Japanese get something in China and Mussolini on the way to getting something in Africa, but he carried the idea too far. With scrupulous consistency he realized the injustice of not allowing the Germans to have something too. On a visit to Berlin, therefore, when the Fuehrer mentioned a naval agreement, he snapped at the chance like a herring at a hook. He brought the good news back to Downing street, and when on the 21st of May Hitler made a speech in the Reichstag of such a pacific nature that it deserved to win him the Nobel Peace Prize for the year London delayed no longer. The Fuehrer had made a direct reference to his desire for a limitation of naval tonnage, by which he meant, more concisely, a further breach in the Versailles treaty and an increase in German naval tonnage to 35 per cent. of the British total. With this claim he coupled an assurance that "in no circumstances will Germany depart from the announced extent and expansion of the German defence forces." Despite the fact that Germany's naval expansion had hitherto been unannounced, the British Government was ready to talk. Herr von Ribbentrop was brought hot foot to London to sign a treaty on these terms. There was no time to inform the Russians, who would be most affected by the growth of German naval power in the Baltic, only a few hours to inform the French, whose Navy would only be equal in size to that of Germany's, certainly no time to convoke all the Stresa Powers to ask them what they thought of this unilateral

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(or, rather, bilateral) repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles. But none of these oversights troubled Sir John Simon or his successor, Sir Samuel Hoare. Their case was that Germany was going to build in any event, and that it was much better the building should be done legally (an argument which if applied retrospectively to the law of arson might have had the beneficent result of keeping Leopold Harris out of gaol). "I am quite aware," said Sir Samuel, "that the logical and juridical mind often sees things from an angle different from that of the empirical and the practical. But the Government have no apologies to make for a practical, all-round contribution to peace." Thus garlanded with olive-branches, and with a bottle of appeasement champagne cracked over its side by Sir Samuel Hoare, the German Navy once more heaved anchor and put to sea. Credit for the achievement has unfairly been given exclusively to Admiral Raeder.

Poor M. Laval was distraught by the news. Coupled with the rising temper of the British people, who were demanding stern action against any attack on Abyssinia, it threatened the whole structure of diplomacy which he had founded in Rome in January and consolidated at Stresa in March. Stresa had established the principle of international law, firm on the Rhine, but agreeably vague in the Mediterranean. Now he was confronted by a British Government which, having condoned law-breaking in Europe, was apparently preparing to club the burglar in Africa. In the clash between these two views he feared the collapse of his Triple Alliance. If Mussolini went to war, if the British people were still intent on stopping him, France might have to choose between Britain and Italy. It was a hideous dilemma, but M. Laval still put trust in his own ingenuity. A great anti-British feeling was sweeping the country as a result of the Naval Agreement; he determined to exploit it for the purpose of preventing any strenuous call for sanctions against Italy in his own land. Mournfully

he told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber on the day after the announcement of the Anglo-German agreement that war in Abyssinia was "inevitable." If that were so his only chance was to prevent any stalwart action being taken to stop it. M. Laval departed for Geneva with that aim firmly fixed in his mind. He had faith in Sir Samuel Hoare.

The great day at Geneva was fixed for the 11th of September. All mankind awaited the event. Mussolini had his armies in Abyssinia ready to march. He had issued the threat "with Geneva, despite Geneva, against Geneva." Haile Selassie, Emperor of the threatened state, hoped for a pronouncement which would expose this bombast. Already in July Britain, with half the world following suit, had imposed a ban on the shipment of arms to either of the potential belligerents. This meant that Abyssinia could not get the arms to defend herself; she must therefore rely on her treaties. In Britain the great mass of the people regarded this as the final test of the League system; if yet another aggression were condoned law between nations would be rendered contemptible and jungle rule would return. Almost every small state felt the same urgency; if the Covenant were broken nothing would stand between them and their large, rapacious neighbours. In such circumstances M. Laval arranged for a private meeting between himself, Sir Samuel Hoare, and Mr Anthony Eden on the night of the 10th of September. He was agreeably surprised to discover that, despite the jolts of previous months, there was no real gulf between them. "We found ourselves," he said later, in describing that discussion, "instantaneously in agreement upon ruling out military sanctions, not adopting any measure of naval blockade, never contemplating the closure of the Suez Canal—in a word, ruling out everything that might lead to war."

Next day Sir Samuel Hoare mounted the rostrum. He spoke in clear, emphatic tones. Most admired was the peroration, "In conformity with its precise and

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explicit obligations," he said, "the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression. The attitude of the British nation in the last few weeks has clearly demonstrated the fact that this is no variable and unreliable sentiment; but a principle of international conduct to which they and their Government hold with firm, enduring, and universal persistence." The day on which those words were uttered was the most exciting which Geneva had known since Briand had received Germany into the League. A wild response greeted the speech. M. Laval spoke approvingly in the name of France. The Soviet Union, the Dominions, Holland, Belgium, the Scandinavians, the Little Entente, the Balkan Entente—all pledged themselves to follow the same lead in upholding "in its entirety" the full Covenant of the League (which, in case the reader may have forgotten so academic a point, insists that all members uphold the territorial integrity of each).

A few days after this amazing scene Mussolini started his campaign for the conquest of the Abyssinians, and Sir Samuel Hoare started his campaign for the conquest of the British electorate. The only item in this section of history not yet known is the precise moment at which, and the exact agency through which, Mussolini was informed that the private agreement of the 10th of September made nonsense of the public profession of the 11th of September. The real decision was made, not in the chamber, but in the ante-chamber. Mussolini must have known as much, for, having spent three years preparing war against one nation, he was not now likely to risk wanton war against fifty.

By the end of October Mussolini's war had begun. So had Sir Samuel's election campaign. On the 30th of October he addressed his constituents at Chelsea. Rumours had been circulated about some secret deal which was to be concocted when he and Laval met at Geneva



a few days before polling date. Sir Samuel scotched them. "Our opponents," he said, "are trying to make ignorant people believe that there is some disreputable intrigue behind this visit, and that it means some sinister change of policy. . . . Our policy has always been perfectly simple—namely, allegiance to the League and readiness to help with any honourable settlement of the dispute that is acceptable to the three parties concerned—the League, Italy, and Abyssinia. That has always been our policy. It always will be our policy, and it is the policy that I will support at Geneva. In the meanwhile let us pay no attention to these whisperings and innuendoes. Let us take them at their real worth. They are electioneering, pure and simple, and nothing more." Fifteen days after that speech the Government for which Sir Samuel spoke was returned with a triumphant majority.

With this matter disposed of, the stage was cleared for the re-entry of M. Laval. On the 21st of November, seven days after the British General Election, a representative of the British Foreign Office journeyed to Paris. Together he and M. Laval hammered out a plan. On the 7th of December Sir Samuel Hoare crossed the Channel, and stopped in Paris for some hours before proceeding to a skating holiday in Switzerland. Together the two Foreign Ministers considered the compromise. The Emperor was to surrender part of his territory in return for Italian recognition of the rest. Thus would Haile Selassie save part of his Empire. Thus would France keep her ally. The only casualty was "the principle of steady and collective resistance to unprovoked aggression." The two statesmen looked on their work and saw that it was good. Sir Samuel Hoare travelled on to his skating in Switzerland. The plan was dispatched to London. Next morning Mr Baldwin discovered it on his breakfast table. It looked good to him too. And in the House of Commons, while deploring the leakage in the Press, he upheld the action of his colleague. He stood by him hip to hip, shoulder to shoulder, sealing

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his lips against a barrage of questions. It was a touching display of Ministerial solidarity.

A few days later, however, the House assembled in a different atmosphere. A mighty revolt of British public opinion jerked the plan overboard and Sir Samuel out of office. It was a tempest sweeping all before it—all except Mr Baldwin. He stood steady as a rock, still sealing his lips, steadfastly refusing to resign with the colleague he dismissed and whose policy he so heartily approved. Yet even here he was not uncharitable. A great debate was staged in the House of Commons. In the sight of the whole nation and the world the policy of steady and collective *assistance* to unprovoked aggression was roundly condemned. Sir Samuel was compelled to walk the plank—and drop conveniently into a near-by lifeboat. Some months later he was hauled up the side of the National Government ship in the risible guise of First Lord of the Admiralty. Such was the reward for his resignation speech delivered exactly ninety days after his great pronouncement at Geneva. “It was like a skivvy asking for a reference,” said Lloyd George in the lobbies outside.

Meanwhile Britain wondered what the horrors might be that Mr Baldwin dared not utter. Harrow mourned the strange, inexplicable cleavage which had come between two of her sons. And while Britain wondered and Harrow mourned Hitler rearmed, Mussolini prepared for triumphant battle in the spring, and poor M. Laval was left sweeping up the fragments of his shattered diplomacy.

### V

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar*

In ten short days in that spring of 1936 Europe rattled to the brink of war. On the afternoon of the 28th of February Italian troops captured Mount Amba

Alagi; they had routed the main Abyssinian force. That night the French Senate ratified the Franco-Russian Pact in Paris. For years the French Right had delayed and prevaricated. Now, with one ally slipping from her in the Mediterranean, France must grasp the hand of another in the east.

Hitler was watching. Two months hence—who knows?—Italy and France might have composed their differences. Two months hence the Franco-Soviet Pact might be solid and firm. Perhaps his chance was fading. He must tighten his nerve. He must be ready to stake all on a blow at the precise moment.

Geneva was talking about an oil sanction. Rome told Paris that its imposition would mean the exit of Italy from the League and the end of the Franco-Italian agreement. Paris was demanding an alliance with Britain to protect her Rhine frontier. London was doubtful. It was Friday, March 6, and there was still no settlement. What matter? It would all be cleared up next week. But next week would be too late. Nothing again in the continent of Europe would be the same after that fateful Saturday.

Already that week Hitler had summoned his war chief, Marshal Blomberg. Blomberg said no. He summoned the Reichstag for Saturday noon. Still Blomberg said no. But this time Hitler answered with a torrent of words. So the Army had lost its nerve. For sixteen years they had prated of a rejuvenated Germany. Now the chance had come the Army chiefs would skulk off in a funk. He was shouting to keep up his own courage. For long enough he had tussled in his own mind with this same inexorable fact that if the French hit back Germany would crumple beneath the blow. How could he answer this powerful phalanx of military wisdom? There was only one answer. Beating harder every minute in his brain was the firm dictate of his own political cunning—"France will not dare." Blomberg was silenced. That night, therefore, when Hitler, Goering,

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and the others assembled at a beer party in Berlin the decision had already been taken. They drank to the success of a gamble which would make or break the Nazi *régime*.

At noon in the Reichstag next day Hitler rose to speak, pale and drawn and nervous. His throat was dry and hoarse with a week of arguing. He denounced Locarno. He attacked the Franco-Soviet Pact. He offered non-aggression pacts and a plan for twenty-five years of peace. Then his voice broke, and in a screeching yell came the words, "In this historic hour when German troops in the western provinces of the Reich are just occupying their future peace-time garrisons——" A terrific roar shook the assembly. Europe stayed to hear no more. Thirty thousand German troops were marching into the demilitarized Rhineland. Paris heard the news an hour before, and already there were shouts of war and mobilization beside the newspaper kiosks.

That afternoon the French Cabinet met. The generals came too. Several favoured mobilization. Premier Sarraut turned to General Gamelin. "You can mobilize two classes," said the General, "or else have a general mobilization, but there is nothing in between." The debate went on. Mobilization meant German capitulation or war. There could be no drawing back. Poland was ready to march. But what would England say? And what, too, of the rumour that General Goering had two thousand aeroplanes ready to send over Paris? It was a fearful choice. After anxious minutes the French Cabinet decided to reinforce the frontier—and appeal to the League.

France was smarting from her worst defeat since Versailles, and the League meeting in London brought no balm for her wound. England was bearing the blow with the irritating complacency with which one man suffers another's attack of rheumatism. "We have no desire," said Mr Baldwin, "than to keep calm, to keep our heads, and to continue to bring France and Germany

together in a friendship with ourselves." That was a poor consolation for a nation which had just seen fifteen years of her diplomacy collapse in an hour. Nothing less had befallen. France had lost the key to her system of eastern alliance. Germany was able to bolt and bar the door from the inside. The great bluff had succeeded. Now she could play at blackmail in the east.

"Those were sleepless nights for us," said Goebbels, who knew how the conquest had been gained. "We have in Europe no further territorial demands to make," said Hitler, who knew how more could be garnered in the future.

## VI

No account is given here of the military events in Abyssinia. The Italians had four hundred aeroplanes; the Abyssinians eight, together with a grand total of thirteen anti-aircraft guns, little ammunition, and no gas-masks. The Italians had hundreds of tanks and thousands of motor-lorries; the Abyssinians none. The Italians had all the military equipment accumulated by a major Power over a period of three years; the Abyssinians sixty thousand rifles and six hundred machine-guns. The rest of the campaign can be briefly summarized:

'Twas a manly blow.

The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant,  
And then thou wilt be famous.

This precept was followed precisely. The military achievement of the Fascist *régime*, which began with a raid on the open town of Corfu, was continued *via* Abyssinia, with a short interval for reflection at Guadalajara, to the triumphant climax of the wielding of the whole gigantic armament of Italy to crack the Albanian nut.

More significant than the events in Abyssinia were the lessons to be learnt from the way in which the victory had been gained. Hitler had profited from the British and French preoccupation with Mussolini. Mussolini

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had gained from the continual threat presented by Hitler. Clearly it was to the benefit of both parties that the collaboration should continue on a more permanent basis. It is not possible, therefore, to take the facile view that the feeble and half-hearted sanctions applied against Mussolini drove him unnecessarily into the bosom of Hitler. He went there, not in spite for the past, but in high hope for the future. Two blackmailers understood that they could extract more if they worked in conspiracy together. They were joined by a third party, Japan, who could have no cause for complaint on the ground of sanctions. Mussolini exactly understood the process. On the 24th of October he made a speech in Bologna in which he declared, "We hold out an olive-branch. But pay attention. This olive-branch emerges from an immense forest. It is a forest of eight million bayonets—eight million bayonets whetted to razor-blade sharpness and entrusted to young and fearless hearts." That same day two men stood on the terrace of a country house in the Bavarian Alps. They gazed across the German frontier into the forest land of Austria. They talked for three hours. That night Count Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister, left his host and travelled into Munich. There he interviewed the journalists. The Fuehrer would recognize the Italian conquest in Abyssinia. In Spain Germany and Italy were at one in their desire and determination to see the victory of General Franco, who had just raised his flag of rebellion against a democratic Government. Austria would not present any difficulty. Had not Herr Hitler and Herr Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, signed an agreement three months earlier recognizing Austria's independence?

The Axis was born. For two years its armies and its allies, mobilized and marching, would terrorize all Europe and half Asia. Who would arise to contest the rule of the jackboot? A challenge involved risking the noble fate of Louis Barthou. A refusal to challenge involved risking the ignominious Nemesis which had

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overtaken General Schleicher and Dr Dollfuss. It was a task for statesmen and great nations. Yet for three years the cause of all civilized mankind was borne almost alone and unaided by the citizen armies of China and the ragged workmen of Spain.

## CHAPTER XI

### IRONSIDES OF DEMOCRACY

Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood !  
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy—  
Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,  
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue—  
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;  
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife,  
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Cæsar*

Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands,  
Showing an outward pity—yet you Pilates  
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,  
And water cannot wash away your sin.

*King Richard II*

FASCISM," said Mussolini on one notable occasion, "is not an article for export." This phrase had always been much treasured by British Cabinet Ministers, Press Lords, and Bishops; for, despite their fondness for the *régime* in Italy, they had no particular desire to see it slopping over the Mediterranean, which was still, after all, the lifeline of the Empire. The phrase, however, was unfortunately the precise reverse of the truth. The failure of Mussolini's statesmanship in the economic sphere ensured that Fascism was about the only article of export which Italy had left. This fact was properly understood by others with a keener perception than the blinkered optimists in Downing Street. Among these was a group of Spanish Monarchists who were ushered in to the sanctuary of the Roman dictator on a March day in 1934.

They had a woeful tale to tell. For generations Spain had been ruled by the monarchy, the Church, the Army, and the landlords. Together these elements had suppressed any signs of revolt with such success that even the civilizing ideas of the French Revolution had never



been allowed to break through the crust of Spanish feudalism. Louis XV and Mme de Pompadour would have found themselves more at home in the Spain of the 1920's than in any other European state. The monarchy, although corrupt, was still intact. The Jesuits controlled a third of the nation's capital. The Church was the biggest landowner in the country, while its business enterprises were untaxed and even specifically subsidized by the State. Similar privileges were held by the military caste. The Army of a hundred thousand men, which suffered humiliating defeat at the hands of the Riffs in the early twenties, had on its active list one hundred and ninety-five generals, six thousand colonels and majors, five thousand captains, and six thousand subalterns; in short, one officer for every six soldiers. The Navy, which had engaged in no considerable adventure since the days of the Armada, had more admirals than the British Fleet. Finally, the landlords retained the same degree of authority which perished over half the rest of Europe during the decade following 1789. Fifty thousand of them owned half the nation's land, while eighty thousand priests, monks, and nuns ensured that the majority of the populace was kept in a suitable state of subservient piety. Just occasionally a new spirit stirred in the back streets of Barcelona and Madrid or across the peasant lands; without pity it was crunched back into the dirt by the Army, which waged war only rarely against any but domestic foes.

For a century Spain had been governed by this means. With her rulers, fearful perhaps for the survival of so arrogant a despotism, the country had even been spared the full commotions which would have followed participation in the Great War. And for twelve subsequent years the feudal structure was preserved unimpaired, until in 1931, under the leadership of a timorous Liberalism, King Alfonso was toppled off his throne, and the solemn memory of wrong which the Spanish people had stored in their hearts found some expression in a

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democratic republic. So far only the point on the pyramid of tyranny had been chipped; the great bulk of landlordism, priestcraft, and militarism remained. To the removal of this weight the Republic turned its thoughts, if not its energies. The Church was to be disestablished; education was to be taken from the convents into the hands of the State; social legislation was to bring new hope to the cities; radical land reforms were to transform the countryside. These were the aims of Spanish Liberalism. From it all there was a chance that a new Spain might be born, despite the intrigues of the Monarchists and despite the momentary transference of power back from the Liberals to the reactionaries in the 1933 Parliament. It was this fear which had prompted the Monarchist parties to send a delegation to Mussolini in the following year. They wanted to stifle the babe in the womb. Mussolini, who in any case had a special taste for infanticide, welcomed them because he knew that the master of Spain might in some conditions assume the mastery of the Mediterranean. The Spaniards who wanted their King back and their lands secure had no difficulty in reaching an agreement with the Italian dictator, who didn't care a fig about Alfonso, but who was very interested in the narrow stream below Gibraltar and the French shipping routes which passed under the eye of the Spanish islands of Majorca and Minorca. The deal was made. Mussolini offered arms for the overthrow of the Republic and the restoration of the monarchy, arranged for the consignment of machine-guns, promised finance, and even specified the figure of the immediate military equipment to be supplied to these needy royalists.

In Spain itself the patriots who were now working to overthrow the Republic to which they had sworn allegiance found other interested backers. The German Embassy in Madrid became a centre for their activities; propaganda was poured out all over the country, and down in Morocco Nazi officers found their way into the

Spanish Foreign Legion. General Sanjurjo, who had attempted a *putsch* in 1932, been tried for treason, and reprieved, went off to Berlin to test Hitler's views on the subject of Spanish monarchy. And while Hitler and Mussolini showed such fine concern for the fate of King Alfonso, while soldiers sharpened their swords and rich Spaniards intrigued, the Government itself swung more to the right, beating down every sign of resistance amid blood and massacre, preparing for the day when the generals could step in with an old-time Spanish pronunciamiento and restore to its throne not monarchy alone, but the whole feudal edifice, immaculate and uncoloured by even the shadow of Liberalism. All went according to plan. In 1934 the Left was pulverized; ten thousand dead and thirty thousand politicians behind bars should have finished that prospect for ever. Yet it was often in those prison cells that the sons of Spain, despite their love of faction, discovered that just as they had the same enemy, so they had the same cause. Socialists, Communists, Anarchists, Liberals, joined in one band to fight back against the counter-revolution. To the consternation of the Right, they gained victory at the polls in February 1936. This time the Republic was in greater earnest. It did not strike remorselessly against the Church, the Army, nor even against the landlords. But none could doubt that it would do so soon. Peasants were seizing the land. Factory-workers walked through the streets as if they would soon be theirs. All the agony of the previous three years had fired their determination. The child was born, a far lustier infant than ever the Right had thought possible. All the greater, therefore, was the need for the murderers to work fast.

The plot was arranged in detail. On a set day rebel officers would raise the flag of revolt in the mainland and in Morocco. One general was to fly from the Balearics to Barcelona, another from Lisbon to Madrid. General Mola would start from the north; General Franco from the south. The dates were known in the Ministries of

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War in Rome and Berlin, and if any opposition withstood the stores of German guns and Italian munitions Moorish troops were to be imported from Morocco, together with a good stiffening of Italian and German experts. All the dynamite was laid when a double murder in Madrid set alight the fuse probably a little before calculation. On the 12th of July José Castillo, a lieutenant in the Madrid police force, was killed by Spanish Fascists. Next day in revenge Calvo Soletó, one of the chiefs of the Monarchists, was dragged out of his home and left dead at the gate of a cemetery. These killings unloosed new passions throughout the country, and in the next four days there was a mounting noise of murder. On the 19th of July General Franco landed in Morocco from the Canaries, put himself at the head of his Moorish legions, while a cruiser bombarded Algeciras in preparation for a Moorish landing. That same day Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Toledo, Burgos, Coruna, and many other centres had their first taste of Franco rule. "The rebels," wrote the President of the Madrid Faculty of Law,

in all districts occupied by them systematically shoot workers carrying a trade union card. The corpses are left lying on view in the streets, or heaped up in the cemeteries, each with the card of a trade union tied to leg or arm, in order to show the reason for the execution. In the town of Seville alone, and independently of any military action, more than nine thousand workers and peasants were executed.

But even this butchery could not kill Spain. In Madrid, Barcelona, and many other cities the revolt was crushed and the rebels executed, while some who gained victory behind the barricades went in search of their enemies in hiding or even gutted a church or two, which they may have regarded as a symbol of the past, and which was often an actual rebel munition store. Some British M.P.'s, a few clergymen, and plenty of other crocodiles expressed holy horror at these last outrages, but had no tear for the fifty thousand Spanish workmen murdered

during that first fortnight without a weapon in their hands. Their crime was that they would fight for the Republic which offered them the one chance of relief from penury. They did so triumphantly. For after three weeks General Franco held no part of Spain but the colonies, a strip of coast between Gibraltar and Portugal, and a few posts in the north. This was the result of Spain's plebiscite when men had to vote with their own right arms instead of at the ballot-box. At such a test Franco was thrashed. But the fifty thousand grandes of Spain had another scheme to secure the verdict. They opened the gates to the invaders, and neither Hitler nor Mussolini nor Franco had any fear for the outcome. It would all be over by November.

## II

Badajoz! Talavera! Toledo! Free Spain was crumbling beneath the weight of General Franco's metal. Each name beat only dim recognition into the mind of Madrid. The war which Spaniards knew was war with bomb and rifle in the streets. They knew nothing of the tactics of battle against tanks and machine-guns manufactured in Turin and Dresden. Especially as they had only bare fists.

September had come. General Franco swore that he would be in the capital by October. General Mola boasted that he would be drinking coffee in the Puerta Del Sol by the 12th. But there was a bout of bad weather, and the Generals waited for reinforcements. The 12th came and General Mola was still some thirty miles from his cup of coffee. And in Madrid they put out a *café* table in the street, poured out the coffee, added a garbage-can, and left the notice "Reserved for General Mola."

A few days later Navalcarnero was added to the toll of conquests. Only twenty-seven miles more. Paris and London said that the city was doomed. But Madrid was calm. Too calm. They were ready to snipe from

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the windows. They knew nothing of concerted defence against modern weapons. In any case, the war was still far away—twenty miles, fifteen, but not yet on their doorsteps.

On the last Friday of October six bombs dropped in the main streets. Sixteen were killed, sixty injured. Madrid started from its slumber, and as refugees poured into the city, tugging their donkeys and calling to their little children, a grim dawn descended on a whole people. Moorish troops were only a fourpenny tram-ride away from the centre of the city. Madrid pictured the three-cornered hats of Franco's Civil Guards, badges of reaction. General Mola, they were told, had a white horse ready to take him in triumph to his *café* table. That was Wednesday. Thursday was no better. And at half-past seven on Friday night a black car left from the Ministry of War and pounded off down the Valencia road. It carried Largo Caballero, Prime Minister of Spain. The Government had fled. "Helpless and discredited" was the verdict of the London *Times*. It was the same newspaper which had prophesied in October 1919 that "the Bolshevik Government was near its end." A strange coincidence, for on the walls of the city was posted a placard, "What the people of Leningrad did to the White Armies in 1919 Madrid will do to Franco in 1936."

Saturday was cold and grey. It looked as if Madrid would fight from behind its window-shutters after all. They steeled themselves for that last forlorn endeavour. Before surrender they would bury themselves beneath the ruins of their city. Then Sunday morning. Householders were called to their windows and *café* drinkers from their tables by the sound of marching feet. These men marched in step. They wore khaki corduroys. They had officers. They had rifles. And behind them came lorries and machine-guns and munitions. They were greeted first with staring eyes, next with clenched fists, next with the joyful weeping of women and the shouts of men, and finally with one exultant roar of a people

who believed that salvation from terror and tyranny marched through their streets.

Where had they come from? From Nazi prison camps, from Fascist prison cells, from crowded Paris lodging-houses, from Poland and Canada, from the slums of Glasgow and the back-streets of Rhondda. Some had begged for their passage money; some had scaled the Pyrenees by night; some had dropped over the mountains with not a penny in their pockets and only a trade union card as a passport. Some were experts, some were amateurs; some were young, some were old; some had stood, maybe, in the prison yard at Dachau and seen their comrades bruised by Nazi lash and boot; some had crossed a wild German frontier with the hand of a woman clasped in their own and a child clinging about their necks; some had sat for ten years in the dingy home of an exile with their eyes turned to their native Italy, hearing no sound but the voice of desecration; some, indeed, came from England, believing, like the heroes of old, that shame could be expiated in battle; all were seized with a zeal for adventure, holding great hope for the future, ready to give their lives to drive Franco and Fascism into the sea. So much could be avenged on Spanish fields: a February in Vienna, a March in Berlin, long years in Lombardy, an epoch in London. "I raised an army," said Oliver Cromwell, "of men who know what they fight for and love what they know." Such were the Ironsides of democracy, the International Brigade.

Next day the Moors charged; a belt of fire told them that some new power had arisen from this grave of Spanish freedom. General Mola's tanks were ready to roll in easy conquest through the capital; his assault splintered on a rock of new courage. Six days later Heinkels and Capronis prepared to achieve by unrestrained murder what could not be done by tanks and guns. They found the first Russian 'planes against them. They limped home to their air-fields.

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Franco had failed. All the plots laid in Berlin and Rome had been confounded. Madrid stood as the emblem of the greatest single epic of our times. A name had been given to the world fit to take its place alongside Marathon and Marston Moor. If the Nazi-Fascist Moloch could be overthrown on this ground the reverberations would thunder through every Italian and German city. Nothing could rob Madrid of the reward of its courage—unless reinforcements came for Franco, and with them accomplices who would let the reinforcements pass. Both were on their way. For already on the quaysides of Genoa and Naples the murderous cargo was being stacked high to the heavens, and in London and Paris the amenable accomplices were coming as fast as their bellies would carry them.

### III

The gallant story of the rescue of General Franco may be reduced to a record of dates and facts. On the 30th of August, following lengthy negotiations initiated by London and Paris, a Non-intervention Pact came into force whereby the twenty-seven signatory states pledged themselves to forbid the dispatch of arms to Spain. This policy was in clear defiance of international law, and the expressed fears of Turkey and Yugoslavia revealed as much. They insisted that the agreement "should not constitute a precedent or result in even the implicit recognition of a principle that a Government cannot render to a legal Government, on the demand of the latter, aid in the struggle against rebellion." Berlin, Rome, and Portugal hedged their acceptance with a number of reservations, although they were plainly committed to the main principle. London and Paris had imposed their ban on the shipment of arms before Germany and Italy had signified their final acceptance. Thus while the legitimate Spanish Government confronted a rebellion which held in its control no more than a strip of territory in the south, another strip in the



north, and the African colonies, it was informed that no arms for its suppression could be legally purchased in France, Britain, or any other country which might be supposed to have democratic sympathies.

On the 9th of September the Non-intervention Committee charged to enforce the pact met in London. Nothing was done to apply any control system because the Berlin, Rome, and Lisbon representatives requested time to consult with their Governments. Nothing was done in response to the accusations submitted by the Spanish Government that quantities of arms were already being supplied by Germany and Italy to the rebels. The first excitement occurred, therefore, when on the 7th of October the Soviet Government protested against German and Italian violations of the pact, and announced that if such breaches were not stopped immediately the U.S.S.R. would consider itself free from any obligation resulting from the agreement. To this direct charge of supplying war materials to the Spanish rebels Germany and Italy declared in identical terms that "all such assertions are absolutely fantastic and are devoid of any kind of foundation." To which the Soviet Government replied in turn that if other Governments violated the pact, and if the Non-intervention Committee were not prepared to enforce it, the U.S.S.R. would be "compelled to declare it cannot consider itself bound to a greater extent than any of the remaining participants in the agreement." A month after this first indication of Soviet policy Russian 'planes went into action for the first time. General Franco was thrown back from Madrid. Mussolini decided to stake more in the hope of regaining all. In November both he and Hitler recognized Franco as the legal ruler of Spain. Mr Eden in the House of Commons mourned that it was "unhappily true" that the Non-Intervention Pact had not been strictly observed, but that this fact would not "cause us in any way to modify our decision in favour of the principle of non-intervention." In short, Rome and Berlin were notified

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that, however they might aid their friends in Spain whom they had recognized, Britain would give no aid to the legal Spanish Government.

Mr Eden's speech was tantamount to the delivery of embarkation orders in Italy, but ships waited a day or two for the conclusion of a ceremony in Rome. Britain and Italy concluded a Gentlemen's Agreement guaranteeing the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean. According to Mr Eden, there was "no word, no comma, in the Anglo-Italian Declaration which could give any foreign Power the right to intervene in Spain, whatever the complexion of the Government in any part of that country." According to Mr Eden again (a year later), Italian troops left Italy for Spain almost simultaneously with the signing of the declaration. Next, on the 20th of February, 1937, following an example which Britain and France had already enforced, the Italian Government agreed to forbid the transport of volunteers to Spain. Between the 22nd and the 28th of February ten thousand Italians were landed at Cadiz (according to the *Daily Telegraph* and *Manchester Guardian* correspondents on the spot). In fact, during the whole period from the failure to capture Madrid in November to the end of February numerous reports from Spain telling of fresh Italian intervention came through to London. A huge force had been piled up for a second blow at Madrid. In March it was delivered. On the sixth day of the month four regular Italian divisions, the First, Second, and Third Divisions of the Blackshirts and the First "Littoria" Division, started an offensive on the Guadalajara front. In command were Italian generals. Behind them they had huge stores of Italian equipment, and many miles away was a man who watched their efforts with more than usual interest. On the 13th of March Mussolini addressed to his soldiers this telegram:

On board the *Pola*, sailing towards Libya, I have received a *communiqué* announcing that a great battle is being fought near

Guadalajara. I am following every incident of the engagement and am sure of victory, for I am convinced that the push and tenacity of your legionnaires will overcome the enemy's resistance. To crush the international forces will be a valuable political as well as military success. Inform the legionnaires that I am following, hour by hour, that fight which will be crowned by victory.

Next day he proclaimed himself Protector of Islam, hoping, no doubt, that he would soon be Protector of Spain. He waited for news but nothing came except the tipsy radio voice of the General de Llano announcing the fall of Madrid. But Madrid did not fall. The tenacious legionnaires were compelled to run for their lives. Mussolini stormed back to Rome in a rage, and in London the Italian delegate blandly announced that "not a single Italian volunteer would leave Spanish soil until the end of the war."

From that day the mask was off. One more armed conspiracy against Spanish freedom had been broken on a rock which would require far greater weight to crush. A huge assembly of guns and 'planes would be needed to extirpate this people. Mussolini, therefore, who had measured the diplomats in London so much more closely than the fighting men in Spain, now renounced all camouflage. His intentions were proclaimed publicly for all the world to hear. "In this great fight," he said, "which has brought face to face two types of civilization and two conceptions of the world, Fascist Italy has not been neutral, but has fought, and victory will be hers." With the promise from his backer, with German experts and material guarding against a repetition of Guadalajara, General Franco turned aside from the sturdy ramparts of Madrid, and flung all his modern weapons against the helpless, but defiant, Basques. Guernica, with many villages like it, was reduced to a cinder by German bomb and outrage. Almeria was raked by the guns of the *Deutschland*. Italian troops pounded into Bilbao, while brave Basques put out in open boats to the sea which offered better sanctuary

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than Mussolini's henchmen. Three million refugees crowded into the diminishing territory of the beleaguered Republic, as Italian torpedoes beneath the seas and Italian 'planes above the eastern harbours struck without pity to starve this people to surrender. But all the might of Italy could not cow them. They held their thousand-mile front, raised a new army in the defence of freedom, worked long hours at the last in Barcelona and Cartagena. They had still the power to throw back their assailants if only reinforcements from Franco could be checked and the right was restored to them to buy foreign metal. As the winter of 1937 drew on ambition was rising again in their midst. A piracy conference had been called at Nyon, with the pirates excluded from the council chamber. This meeting had achieved in a few days what the Non-intervention Committee had failed to secure in a year—momentary defiance of the aggressors. In France and England temper was growing; in the factories was heard the cry of "Aeroplanes for Spain." Even the British Government was not unaffected. In October Mr Eden declared that "the patience of those who have striven to keep their responsibilities towards Europe constantly before them is well-nigh exhausted."

As the New Year dawned fresh hope dawned with it. Franco was accumulating his store of arms, but Madrid was secure and Barcelona ready. France chafed more openly beneath the restriction of a one-sided embargo, and a unanimous vote at the League of Nations had declared that if violations continued much longer "the members of the League who have adhered to the Non-intervention Agreement will have to contemplate putting an end to non-intervention." The time for the execution of that threat was approaching. It was at this moment that the British Government announced the opening of negotiations for a treaty—with the invaders.

## CHAPTER XII

### LUNCH IN LONDON, DINNER IN VIENNA

Alas ! it is the narrowness, selfishness, minuteness of your sensation that you have to deplore in England at this day; sensation which spends itself in bouquets and speeches; in revellings and junketings; in sham fights and gay puppet shows, while you can look on and see noble nations murdered, man by man, woman by woman, child by child, without an effort or a tear.

JOHN RUSKIN, *Sesame and Lilies*

IN February and March 1938 history was made in Berlin and Rome, in Vienna, and on the Aragon front in Spain. In those same two months history was quite as spectacularly *not* made in London. Events in all these areas are closely interlinked, but horribly confused. For the sake of clarity and to escape the charge of prejudice the various currents will be kept in rigidly separate channels with only occasional cross-references.

In London the scene revolved around Mr Anthony Eden. He had acquired a unique position in British politics, for although he was a member of a Government of the Right, he was acclaimed by the parties on the Left. Labour and Liberal politicians, no less than the Conservative Central Office, conjured with his name. He was certainly rich; in an age of septuagenarians he was frivolously young; he had good connexions; he had good looks; he spoke with competence, if not with eloquence; and the combination of high office already achieved with promise so obviously unfulfilled ensured that his future was associated with the Premiership, at any rate in the mind of a great body of the public. No politician so young had gained so wide a reputation since the arrival of Mr Lloyd George and Mr Churchill at the House of Commons in the years before the War.

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The means whereby he had climbed to this eminence deserves further scrutiny.

His rise had been meteoric. Less than a decade before he was plodding faithfully along the political rut reserved for Conservative back-benchers. The trouble with the stern, unbending Tories in those far-off days was that they had enough rising hopes to man about five administrations. Yet, while the ranks of untapped genius seemed to multiply on the back benches, those at the front showed little sign of heeding the clamorous demand of youth. Mr Baldwin in his 1924-29 Government revealed a steady determination to reward the companions of his own obscurity before the War, while party unity demanded that most of the other plums should be distributed among the veterans of Lloyd George's old Coalition. Youth had to bide its time. And, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, the young men followed impeccably behind Mr Baldwin's banner.

This was the new "Young England," although they never conformed very closely to the Disraeli model. Perhaps in their comfortable clubs they fingered nervously the pages of *Coningsby* with one eye kept open over their shoulder lest the Whips might be looking. Then, with a sigh, they would close the volume and return it wistfully to its shelf. Revolt was not for them. They followed their leader with the loyalty of leeches. So in the stormy days of the Labour Government the young men waited. It was a formidable array of unignited rockets—Mr Boothby, the expert on currency and finance; Mr Duff Cooper, the sharpest-tongued, and with a by-election victory at St George's, Westminster, to his fame; Walter Elliot, Oliver Stanley, Captain Cazalet, and finally Captain Anthony Eden, who could always be relied upon to intervene on the affairs of the Near East with the authority of an oriental scholar.

The year 1931 came, and all the rockets went up—all, that is, except Mr Boothby and Captain Cazalet. They remained obstinately stuck in the ground with the

back-bench squibs. But the others quickly lit up the political firmament. They soared, and every political gossip-writer was engaged in the pastime of spotting future Prime Ministers. First it was Walter Elliot; next Oliver Stanley; next Mr Morrison. Yet only seven short years later most of the sticks had come down with a thud. Anthony Eden, who went higher than his colleagues, was the only one who retained any hope of the Premiership. But his story was one of unhappy pathos which none of the others could equal.

There is a tale told of Pius IX, the Pope who was called to control the affairs of the Catholic Church in the days of the Italian Risorgimento. "My God!" he cried on the day of his election. "They want to make a Napoleon of me who am only a poor country parson." Anthony Eden might bewail his elevation in similar tones. When he kissed in on that August day in 1931 he can scarcely have known what strange forces were to swirl him to the top and result in his being kicked out seven years later.

In 1931 the Left had been scotched, but not killed. And soon Japan's assault against China, the long wrangle of the Disarmament Conference, Germany's departure from Geneva by the emergency exit, and, finally, Mussolini's preparations for conquest in East Africa brought a rising temper among the battalions on the Left. But it was an army without a general, so a few of the corporals were instructed to go out and look for one. They hunted high and low. They searched every nook and cranny. For months they returned to report failure to their growingly exasperated followers. Still, they did not despair, and a day came when Lord Cecil, wandering disconsolate through the echoing halls of Geneva, caught an accent which cheered him. Right under the nose of the arch-enemy, Simon, he had discovered his man, snugly concealed from public notice under the title of Under-Secretary. Back in London the news spread rapidly. The League of Nations Union and the parties

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of the Left had been looking for a youthful knight-errant able to lead the crusade for collective security. They had discovered a personable young Tory with a strong party loyalty, surviving from the days when he had played at elder statesmanship with Mr Boothby, and a faint taste for idealism in his perorations. The fun had begun. It was to be a simple farce of mistaken identity.

History may marvel how the original mistake came to be made. Family connexions with the Widdingtons, the Sheffields, the Veres, and the Fairfaxes; descent from big landowners who had played their part in the enclosing business of the eighteenth century; the usual progress through Eton and Oxford; a good war record; five scholarships in oriental languages and a taste for Jane Austen; a few years' apprenticeship under Sir Austen Chamberlain—this was hardly the training for a man to be charged with the task of raiding the ramparts of reaction. Nor was the record of active political intervention much more promising. He had denounced the Geneva Protocol in 1924. He had attacked Lord Cecil for his resignation from the Conservative Government in 1927, in terms which Sir Henry Page Croft could scarcely have failed to applaud. And again, when trouble reared its head in the Far East, he flung rhetorical challenge into the face of the Opposition. "Is there anyone," he asked, "who wants this country to act as a special constable between Japan and China, or Poland and Russia?" This was the Anthony Eden who took his first noticeable step up the political ladder in 1931. It was the same Anthony Eden whom Lord Cecil bumped into during his sleep-walks through the corridors of Geneva. Perhaps it was the proximity of the egregious Simon which inspired the illusion. Down along the labyrinth of stilted ambiguities through which the eminent lawyer led his mesmerized listeners a man who spoke a language that was at least comprehensible must be acclaimed as an orator. In the presence of Simon it was not difficult to establish a reputation for idealism,



plain speaking, and a wealth of other qualities. Whatever the cause, the result was immediate and remarkable. Despite the obvious unwillingness of the National Government throughout the years 1933 and 1934 to take any step which might be represented as collective security, despite the disavowals of Mr Baldwin, despite the wriggles of Simon, a growing section of the Left persuaded themselves, if not the general public, that they had a firm friend of the League inside the administration. Troy would fall to the brave young Captain who would soon emerge from his Trojan horse.

Unfortunately, the young champion showed a depressing loyalty to his political superiors. At Geneva he accepted the assurances of the Japanese, not perhaps with the eagerness of Simon, but at least with no obvious distaste. At home he would denounce with his colleagues the pugnacious pacifists whose only crime was that they wanted to accept him as their leader. A few crumbs of satisfaction, however, were allowed to those who liked to believe that the Young Tory was really a Left Wing Liberal. He paid a visit to Moscow, and must surely have learned some wisdom from M. Litvinov. He played his part in the organization of the Saar plebiscite. Best of all, when it appeared that Sir John Simon's genius was for domestic rather than foreign affairs, when Mussolini was actively preparing for his thrust against Abyssinia, and when Sir Samuel Hoare was proclaiming remorseless opposition to Italy's designs, it appeared that the young knight-errant was working ceaselessly at Geneva on behalf of the cause of his uninvited followers.

True, he had been there with Sir Samuel Hoare in that famous conversation with M. Laval on the night of the 10th of September when, as M. Laval later revealed, any decisive action against the aggressor had been instantaneously ruled out of court. True also, throughout coming weeks it was this principle which guided British policy. A section of the British public, however, particularly through the fateful days of the General Election

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which happened to intervene, liked to believe that it was the letter of the Covenant which guided the footsteps of our statesmen. They believed it largely because of the idolatrous faith which they chose to repose in Mr Eden. But that was their fault, not his. Certainly he worked harder for more stringent sanctions than other British representatives, but never did he announce his willingness to go to the limit to challenge the aggressor. Still, the Left would not desert their hero. Sir Samuel Hoare and M. Laval produced their plan. Mr Baldwin was forced to bid a tearful farewell to the Foreign Secretary whose policy he so fully approved. Mr Eden stepped up into his shoes. The Left was jubilant. The Trojan horse was disgorging their champion. Very soon Troy would be in their hands.

Once again hopes had to be deferred. Providence seemed determined to wring the last ounce of irony from a political situation where, on the one hand, the Left had not got a leader and where, on the other, the leader was determined not to lead the Left. It was Mr Eden who had to defend the removal of sanctions in the House of Commons. It was Mr Eden who sponsored the policy of non-intervention in face of the new aggression in Spain. The hero appeared to be announcing to his followers as they dismounted that he was on the side of the Trojans after all.

This was the situation in the middle days of February 1938, when a sudden crisis burst upon the British public and made Mr Eden the most talked of politician in Europe. For long there had been rumours, but no hard facts. First, in the previous autumn Lord Halifax had been sent by the Cabinet to meet Field-Marshal Goering in Berlin and go off on a hunting party with him; rumour suggested that Mr Eden, who still retained the title of Foreign Secretary, had objected and even offered his resignation as protest. Next, on the 12th of February, Herr von Schuschnigg, Chancellor of Austria, had been to see Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Little was apparently

known of the subject-matter of their talk; Downing Street averred that they had merely reached an amicable agreement on the future relations of their two countries, but irresponsible scaremongers in London and even more irresponsible newspaper correspondents in Vienna hinted that something more was afoot. In particular the *Times* newspaper correspondent on the 16th of February was most specific. "Herr Hitler," he said,

used the plainest language in stating his demands, and it is understood that he recommended compliance to Herr von Schuschnigg in the most emphatic terms and expressed the view that the Austrian Government had no backing to hope for in any third quarter if they were obdurate. . . . The presence of three German generals gave a suitably impressive background.

Finally, more rumours came from Rome. In the previous autumn Mr Chamberlain, who had followed Mr Baldwin in the Premiership, had exchanged personal letters with Mussolini. Now it was hinted that the letters were bearing fruit and that negotiations might soon be opened between Britain and Italy. The Left parties pricked up their ears. They suspected Nazi disturbance in Vienna. They feared negotiations with Italy, since they believed these could only be undertaken if Britain were to recognize the Italian conquest in Abyssinia and condone Italian invasion in Spain. Their hopes were raised by the rumours that Mr Eden was protesting in the Cabinet. The *Sunday Express* even announced that he was about to resign. The sober twopenny and recently twopenny newspapers steadfastly denied such ridiculous surmising, but outside their coterie of readers the rumour was wantonly accepted. Something was happening behind the scenes. On the 17th of February the Italian Press launched a particularly venomous attack on the young Foreign Secretary. On the 20th Hitler joined the assault, and in a speech of derision and hate singled out Mr Eden as the chief of his enemies. That night the news broke. It was true. The hero was a hero after all.

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For late on the 20th of February he resigned from the British Government, and his resignation was accepted.

Mr Eden had learned his politics at the Foreign Office. They did not quite approve of the habit of the new Prime Minister of writing personal notes to the dictator of Italy. Mr Eden himself was subjected to a fierce personal tug-of-war. He was doubtful of the wisdom of making a new agreement with Mussolini until the old agreements had been fulfilled, although to him, unlike his followers, this was almost as much a matter of diplomatic etiquette as of political principle. All the same, he was still a loyal Conservative Party man, while he could hardly oppose the main item of the Government's foreign policy—non-intervention—on the grounds that one side was intervening, since he himself had enunciated this policy as being in Britain's interest whatever action might be taken by the other Powers. Throughout the previous weeks these conflicting principles had tussled in his political soul. Only by much effort did he reach the decision to make the final break, and now, when the moment arrived, the point of breach had become so slender and dubious that the effect was lost in anticlimax. In the House of Commons he defended his action, while observing all the courtesies and paying a special tribute to the friendship which Mr Chamberlain had always shown him. Mr Chamberlain was equally courteous in reply. He gave the impression that the only dispute concerned a question of procedure. Nothing was involved but an issue of diplomatic technique.

None the less, the resignation resulted in a new wave of hero-worship on the Left. Had not Herr Hitler fiercely attacked Eden the day Mr Chamberlain accepted his withdrawal? Had not Lord Cranborne, Mr Eden's Under-Secretary, referred, in words his chief dare not utter, to "surrender to blackmail"? Surely now he would justify all those hopes which in previous years he had titillated in his perorations, but never fulfilled in his actions. One quality alone, indeed, in those subsequent

hours and days might have made Anthony Eden the biggest power in the land. He needed only political daring and a readiness to declare merciless war on the Conservative Whips. Opportunity lay wide open before him. But he was either afraid or unwilling to strike. A few speeches showing a new and tender interest in the unemployed whose ranks he had now joined were hardly likely to cause Captain Margesson, the Government Whip, the loss of a night's sleep.

This, therefore, was the first epoch-making piece of history that was *not* made in London during the February days. Had Mr Eden been prepared to renounce his upbringing and defy the Conservative Party he could have driven a rift deep within its ranks, and perhaps rallied more than half the nation against further concession to the dictators. The issue was implicit in the debate which followed his resignation. Not merely did he disagree with Mr Chamberlain about the treatment of Italy, but he disagreed probably about the treatment of Germany; for, as he himself said, "within the last few weeks upon one most important decision of foreign policy which did not concern Italy at all the difference was fundamental." He believed, in short, that the dictators should be appeased no more. Mr Chamberlain, on the other hand, foreshadowed whole vistas of new appeasement in every available quarter, down every explorable avenue, and under every mud-caked stone. He spoke of the need of conversations between the four Powers—Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. "*We must not delude small, weak nations,*" he said, in order to leave the matter in no doubt, "*into thinking that they will be protected against aggression and acting accordingly.*" Here, then, was the ground for a frontal clash between the Premier and his ex-Foreign Secretary. But it did not come. The Conservative Party knows too well how to look after its young. And there is more rejoicing at the Conservative Central Office over one just man that, having left the fold, repenteth than over the ninety-and-nine sinners

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who need no repentance. History was not made in London. Berlin and Rome had no competitors.

In the same February there was another chapter in which London scrupulously refrained from figuring. The newspaper correspondents in Vienna were becoming every day more irresponsible. Austria, they repeated, was threatened; Hitler at Berchtesgaden had delivered an ultimatum. Mr Chamberlain determined to kill the rumour. "What has happened," he said, in reply to a questioner on the 2nd of March, "has been that these two statesmen agreed to certain measures being taken with a view to improving relations between the two countries." The same answer was maintained for the next eight days, and meanwhile Herr Schuschnigg announced his intention to conduct a plebiscite, so that the Austrian people might speak their desire for independence. On the 10th of March another scene took place in the House of Commons. A Labour Member, Mr Arthur Henderson, rose to ask a question. The rest is recounted in the published reports:

MR HENDERSON: In view of the intention of the Austrian Government to conduct a plebiscite on Sunday next on the question of the independence of Austria, has the Prime Minister any statement to make on the matter, having regard to the provisions of the Treaty of Saint Germain [which provided for the maintenance of Austrian independence]?

MR CHAMBERLAIN: No, sir. I have no statement to make. [*Loud Ministerial cheers.*]

MR HENDERSON: Will not the Prime Minister, in consideration of the special circumstances in which Austria finds herself [*Tory uproar and cries of "No, no"*] express the hope that this plebiscite may be carried through without foreign interference and without pressure from abroad, in order that the Austrian people shall be really able to make use of its unhindered right of self-determination?

There was no answer. Next day Mr Chamberlain entertained Herr von Ribbentrop to lunch at No. 10 Downing Street. Bad news came in with the fish course,

telling of a Nazi ultimatum issued to Vienna demanding the withdrawal of the plebiscite and the surrender of Schuschnigg. That night independent Austria was no more. Over the coffee Mr Chamberlain expressed to Herr von Ribbentrop his profound shock.

"To the blind," said Thomas Carlyle, "all things are sudden." Equally to the blindfold.

## II

What was this strange, volcanic eruption which spat its lava over Mr Chamberlain's luncheon table? To answer that question we must go back four years.

When Dollfuss was murdered in 1934 and the Nazi plot had been unmasked Hitler had not buried his resolve to bring Austria back to the Reich. He had merely bided his time. In 1936 he signed an agreement with the Austrian Chancellor, Herr von Schuschnigg, guaranteeing the independence of Austria, but gaining for his Austrian Nazis immense privileges in the State. These they employed to good purpose, until in the first days of 1938 the hour was approaching for another stroke. Instructions were sent to the Nazis in Vienna ordering them to provoke civil strife and pledging them, among other interesting items, that there would be no intervention by the Western Powers under the post-War treaties to prevent the union of the two countries. These plans were thwarted by a raid which Schuschnigg ordered on the Nazi headquarters. Hitler was angry. He summoned to Berchtesgaden his emissary in Vienna, none other than Herr von Papen, the same who had raised Hitler to the Chancellorship in 1932 in the belief that the Fuehrer could be kept as his prisoner, but who since that day had been used for all the more menial of Herr Hitler's diplomatic errands. Von Papen was apologetic. If something had been bungled and von Papen was in the vicinity it was a likely guess that this arch-bungler had had a hand in it. But Hitler gave him another life.

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He had a new plan. "I give you orders," he said, "to bring Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden. Leave the rest to me."

With a hunted look in his eyes and an uneasy feeling about his gullet, von Papen hurried back to Vienna. He had to wheedle and argue. Schuschnigg was doubtful. He was stubborn. He telephoned Mussolini. "My dear fellow," came the reply, "I have the fullest confidence in your statesmanlike gifts." Shattering words, for perhaps they meant that this time there would be no Italian troops across the Brenner. The prop which for four years had upheld the flimsy edifice of Austrian independence seemed to be slipping. Wearily, nervously, secretly, Schuschnigg bowed to von Papen's cajolings. He would go as long as Austria should not know. And the secret was still a secret when he was shown into the anteroom at Berchtesgaden on the morning of February 12, 1938.

Kurt von Schuschnigg was quiet, scholarly, reserved, and above all else, an Austrian patriot. For four years he had kept his seat uneasily in the saddle while the Viennese Socialists groaned under suppression, while his own Fascist followers quarrelled among themselves, and while Nazis played with the dynamite of revolution. He clung to Dollfuss's policy, but had not Dollfuss's smile, nor his electrifying powers of publicity. He had only stolid courage to guide him through the Austrian political maze. He stood on the doormat at Berchtesgaden knowing that he would need every ounce of it to survive the coming ordeal.

He was not disappointed. Before he could utter a word in the Fuehrer's presence a torrent of abuse overwhelmed him. He was called a "Jesuit's spawn." He was baited and derided. Hitler paced across the room shouting as he went. "How have you dared," he cried, "all these years to oppress my people, *my* people in Austria? Now your hour has come. God has made me Fuehrer and ruler of every man and woman of German blood, in every country on earth. You shall bow to my will as all the rest of the world shall bow, or I will



break you." Then the shouts mounted to a roar and even to tears. "My people, my dear, dear, tortured German people. Listen to me. Listen to me, I tell you, listen to me. I am the greatest German who has ever lived, do you hear? I am going to march. My people call me." Only after minutes did this fury subside, but even then the worst was not over. Schuschnigg was introduced to General von Reichenau, "Commander of the Armies of Occupation in Austria." He had the plans laid out before him for the German Army's march. At last he was presented with Austria's death warrant in the shape of an ultimatum. Hitler required that the Austrian Nazis should be allowed a chief place in the Austrian Government. In particular he demanded that a Nazi should be appointed as Minister of the Interior and Security. And here alone Schuschnigg was able to extract a concession. He resisted and then yielded, mentioning the name of Dr Seyss-Inquart, a famous Catholic Nazi, as a possible candidate for the post. The Fuehrer pretended that he scarcely knew the name; yet he would make the concession. With that Schuschnigg departed ten hours after he had come, stuttering to his companions in the train that he could not believe that it had really happened, but carrying in his pocket the ultimatum as proof that this nightmare had occurred in the cold light of day.

Three days the Austrian Cabinet debated. There were troops across the German frontier; no answer from Rome, and after all Seyss-Inquart was a Nazi, but a good Catholic, a supporter of Austrian independence; he and Schuschnigg had even been schoolboys together. So at two o'clock on the Wednesday morning news went back to Berchtesgaden that Austria accepted the eleven German demands. Next morning Dr Seyss-Inquart took his oath to protect the security of Austria. A few hours later he was off to Berlin to get his orders.

For the next three weeks Austria was to have two rulers. Seyss-Inquart's Nazis stampeded the streets.

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His police kept the ring for them. And behind the street brawlers and the perjured guards stood always the spectre of the German legions across the frontier. What had Schuschnigg against such odds? Traitors in his Cabinet, office without police power, his own indomitable courage, and behind these slender, battered defences a flickering will for independence among the mass of the Austrian people, still recognizable among the peasants in the countryside, still formidable in the great working-class tenements of Vienna, waiting only for the call of their leaders now beating against the bars of Dollfuss's prison cells. These three weeks indeed saw the tortured birth-pangs of a new Austria. A thrill went through the land when Schuschnigg stood boldly forth before the Austrian Parliament. He quoted Dollfuss's last words: "I only wanted peace. But we had to defend ourselves." "These words," cried Schuschnigg, "were spoken by a dying man. And a dying man does not lie." Immediately the cry of "Heil, Schuschnigg" was spoken with confidence in the land. On the 9th of March the new hero went to Innsbruck. Twenty thousand Austrians, solid for independence, stood outside his meeting-place; and in a brave, trembling voice he threw his bombshell. Austria would have the chance to announce by plebiscite her will for independence. Such news made happier faces in Vienna. Here was a champion ready to fight back against the marauding Nazis. Austria would shout her "Ja" for freedom from the housetops so that all the world could hear and understand.

It was a gay, intoxicating moment, but it gave the signal for the Nazi hammer. That week Mr Chamberlain had no statement to make on the Austrian plebiscite, no concern to refer to the treaties whereby Britain and France and Italy had pledged their interest in Austrian independence. That Friday afternoon, March 11, 1938, Herr von Ribbentrop was lunching in Downing Street, Mussolini was ski-ing in the Alps, Paris was plunged in a Cabinet crisis, Moscow was engaged in State trials.

And while the rest of Europe looked on helpless or unconcerned the hammer fell, making an end of the new-born Austria. Two ultimata followed in as many hours. The plebiscite must go. Schuschnigg must go. To save bloodshed he came to the radio and announced his surrender to force. And while his last words, "God protect Austria!" still echoed through the land Nazi troops were pouring across the frontier, and Herr Himmler was in an aeroplane *en route* for Vienna. For a few precious moments the Vienna radio continued a programme of Schubert and Mozart and Johann Strauss; then the treacherous squawk of Seyss-Inquart; finally the hoarse yell of the *Horst Wessel Song*. No man who loved Vienna could escape the din, and throughout the next days the Gestapo did its work. Refugees packed the trains and, with better chance, took to the hills. Adolf Hitler arrived in his homeland. With him came the terror, cold, scientific, and drawing over gay Vienna a veil as black and impenetrable as pitch to this day.

Austria was no more. Versailles was in ruins. A thick Nazi wedge had been driven into the flank of the Balkans, and half the French edifice of alliance tottered at the impact. Italy too felt the power of the blow. Did she now retain the position of junior partner in the Axis, or was she merely its prisoner? Statesmen in every chancellery realized that the balance in Europe had been tipped in a night. And while they looked disquieted to the future, others hunted desperately for escape from the present. For that day thousands more were added to the mounting toll of Europe's citizens without a country and families without a home; men feared for their own lives and the bodies of their little children. How many more of the peoples of Europe were to fall before this murderous onslaught? That was the question on all men's lips. They had not long to wait for the answer. On the same day that Hitler struck (twenty days after Mr Eden's resignation) news came through from the Aragon front in Spain. General Franco had flung two hundred and

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fifty thousand men into the most terrific offensive of the Spanish war. Rome acclaimed the feats of her conscripts and her airmen. The *Times* newspaper correspondent in Spain spoke of "the terrible punishment" inflicted by "the newly arrived German and Italian air units," and concluded that "nothing could save the cause of the Government in Spain unless foreign intervention comes to the rescue on terms approximately equal to the help Italy and Germany are giving to General Franco." It did not come; General Franco strode like a giant towards the coast. And while he marched Barcelona smarted beneath a blasting, searing battery from the air; in twenty hours in that city six hundred Spaniards were struck dead and thousands maimed. For days on end history was made in Spain and Vienna. German guns and Italian bombers, German police spies and Italian pilots shaped Europe to their model with boot and bludgeon, bomb and fire.

Diplomacy, however, still held its own. In London Mr Chamberlain expressed his horror at the raid on Barcelona, while the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke with his customary eloquence on the "bloodless victory" in Austria. In Rome the British Ambassador conducted negotiations for an Anglo-Italian treaty in a "most friendly atmosphere," while Mussolini himself received a telegram from Hitler saying, "I shall never forget this of you." There was indeed great hope for the future. Berlin was linked to Rome, and Rome to London. Mussolini was promising no more intervention in Spain, and Mr Chamberlain had confidence in his "perfect good faith." And in Berlin General Goering called on the Czech Ambassador. Czecho-Slovakia, he said, need have no fear for her independence. Herr Hitler had guaranteed it.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HOW HITLER DID IT

Tyrants accomplish their Ends much more by Fraud than Force. Neither Virtue nor Force (says Machiavel) are so necessary to that purpose as a lucky Craft; which, says he, without Force has been often found sufficient, but never Force without that. And in another place he tells us their way is With cunning plausible Pretences to impose upon Men's Understandings and in the end they master those that had so little Wit as to rely upon their Faith and Integrity.

'Tis but unnecessary to say, that had not his Highness had a faculty to be fluent in his Tears, and eloquent in his Execrations: Had he not had spongie Eyes, and a supple Conscience; and besides to do with a People of great faith, but little Wit: His Courage and the rest of his Moral Virtues, with the help of his Janizzeries had never been able so far to advance him out of the reach of Justice, that we should have need to call for any other hand to remove him, but that of the Hangman.

COLONEL SILAS TITUS, *Killing No Murder*

ADOLF HITLER had crossed the Austrian frontier at a quarter to four on the afternoon of March 12, 1936. Ten minutes later he was in his native town of Braunau. He was greeted with a tumult of cheering. It mounted in a great, delirious swell until he strode next day up the steps of the Chancellery in Vienna.

His eyes were aglow with triumph. As he stood in his car, deafened by the roar of aeroplanes overhead, his chief and most persistent ambition was crowned. He had gained his Austria for the Reich. The world saw a hero returning to his homeland. But on this man's lips was the taste of something different—the smack of sweetest revenge. Habsburg Austria, Catholic Austria, Socialist Vienna, Jewish Vienna, all the victims of his bitterest hate, were wondering if they would live to see the morning. Some packed the railway-stations, tumbling into carriages, waiting in a sweat of fear and desperation for the first tug of the engine. A few chased for the woods with bundles on their backs. The majority, chained to their fate, waited sullenly in the back streets for the fall

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of the Gestapo guillotine. Their cries were lost amid the shouting. It would not take long to beat these elements into the homogeneous pulp of Nazi Germany. That day Hitler rose to speak in answer to the greetings of his Nazi followers. His voice trembled with almost uncontrollable feeling. "When I set out from this town years ago," he cried, "I carried with me the same deep and faithful conviction which fills me to-day. Imagine my innermost emotion now that I have, after so many long years, brought fulfilment to that faithful conviction."

It was right that he should pay tribute to the convictions which Vienna had imprinted on his brain. They were stamped indelibly. The mind of the man who to-day rules eighty million people was hewn and shaped in immutable form in five years among the doss-houses of the Austrian capital. This is one of the fearful ironies of history. Vienna suckled and nurtured the Colossus who was now planting his feet astride the city.

Thirty years before, a young man nearly twenty, he had trudged through these same streets with a few crowns in his pocket and a bag of clothes in his hand. Behind him he had only twenty tedious years of frustration and defeat. He was already a failure, and in all those years he had acquired nothing—nothing except a queer, unaccountable streak of defiance. At school he had been labelled a dunce. He idled his time in the classroom, irked by the discipline, hating most of all the rebukes of a father who would call him with a whistle through his fingers. "Herr Vater" would make his son an official like himself. But the boy failed in his exams, and at the age of twelve he stopped learning at school. By that time very little was tipped into his brain. At home there was an illustrated history of the Franco-Prussian War, the only book which the old man had in the house. Hitler pored over its pages, and soon dimly in his mind the question formed itself, "Why were the Austrians not there in that triumphal march to the Arc de Triomphe?" In that moment hatred of this contemptible people was

born, but it was still vague and formless. At school the history master had been a German nationalist. He had no love for the rolling Austrian countryside, for the easy-going country-folk, around him. His eyes turned towards the north, to the rugged people who hammered their nation to unity and then turned to seek vengeance against their neighbours. Adolf attended to his history lessons. But soon he was back at home, with his father dead, his mother satisfying his lightest whim, morose, spoilt, ill-tempered with only the gropings of this sense of nationalism and his own romantic dreams of greatness as a painter and an architect rattling in his brain. He journeyed up to Vienna to seek admittance to the Academy art school. He was rejected, and in December 1903 he returned, a failure, to his mother's sickbed.

A year later he stood once again in the streets of Vienna, alone, deprived of his dream of fame as a painter, uprooted from the life he had known. For him it was a descent into an underworld of social lepers. Against this den of filth he would hold high his shield of hate. He trudged on, and found rest for his weary body on a hard wire mattress in a men's hostel. Next day he got some free soup at a near-by monastery. It was winter, and he could shovel snow or, after hours of aching hunger, beg from passers-by. What degradation for one who was the son of an official and held in his bosom the ambition to become a painter! He looked down the long row of beds in the hostel. Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Ruthenians, Poles, Germans who had no claim to the name, Jews—the dregs of humanity. What was it he hated so fiercely in this conglomeration of peoples? He scarcely knew, but as the days went by groped his way to the mystic doctrine of race.

He went out to look for work. For days he was unlucky, until at last he got a job as a bricklayer's hod-carrier. He could not become a bricklayer; the rules of the union barred him. He was an unskilled labourer, lowest of the low. Yet his clothing was still neat, his

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accent cultured. He would have nothing to do with this inferior breed. "I sat aside, drinking my bottle of milk and eating my piece of bread, and carefully studied my surroundings or contemplated my unhappy lot." He was filled with hate and contempt for all he saw around him. The Viennese workman

gets drunk every Saturday, and his wife, in order to keep herself and her children alive, has to fight for the few pence which she can extract from him on the way from his factory to the drinking den. When finally on the Sunday he reaches home, drunk and vicious and invariably with his last penny spent, then you should see the scenes that take place. . . . I don't know what horrified me most at this time; the economic misery of my companions, their moral and ethical coarseness, or the shallowness of their intellectual culture.

The workmen hated poverty. Hitler hated the poor. The workmen's ambition was to raise their class. Hitler's ambition was to rise out of it.

Yet, despite his hates, another urge battled within him—the urge to talk. Even in his schooldays he had a taste for controversy. He could not stifle it now. He read the newspapers. He started to argue. He found to his horror that these contemptible workmen could stump him. So back on his wire mattress he read pamphlet after pamphlet. These men talked of something called Social Democracy. He argued with them; he quarrelled; he lost his job.

One day some weeks later he was sitting on his bed dressed only in a torn pair of trousers. For days he had wandered begging on the pavements, and now his clothes were being cleaned of lice. Naked hunger was visible in his eyes. A man sat on the next bed. He looked across at this skeleton. He was moved to pity. He stretched out his hand and offered to share his total wealth—a hunk of bread. This was Hitler's first and only friend in the miserable city—Reinhold Hanisch, a down-and-out as poor as himself. The two struck up a partnership. They went together for the free soup at the



monastery, beat carpets, and when winter came shovelled snow again. It was desperately cold, and Hitler had no coat. So through bitter, terrible months life dragged on. Together they started a business with Hitler painting postcards and Hanisch selling them. They moved to another hostel. It was a small step up in the world, but it did not end the long days of hunger. He was still an outcast in the underworld.

This was Hitler's life for four years—awful poverty, lice, filth, and wretchedness. Yet it was not the hunger and dirt which cut the deepest marks. It was the envy and loathing bred by poverty which scorched his soul. Far deeper than the normal desires for comfort and security were this man's consuming hates and his boundless urge for political talk. As soon as he had a few crowns in his pocket he was off to the *cafés* and the streets to argue and to rant.

His world was now forming to a pattern. Down in that first doss-house, amid the welter of peoples, he learned for the first time to recognize the Jew. He claims that at the first encounter he felt "sick at the smell of these gabardine-wearers." It could hardly have been true, for he would still argue with them in the *cafés*. But he was reading pamphlets, combing the newspapers, and picking up the political gossip of the city. He "suddenly discovered over and above its physical uncleanness the moral stain of the Chosen People." These Jews were everywhere—in the Press, in the theatre, in art, in literature. He had discovered a scapegoat for his own ignominy. Worst of all, he found that the Social Democrats, the hated workers who had flogged him out of one of their *cafés*, had as their leader in Vienna a Jew. Karl Marx, another Jew, was their prophet. Surely here was the key to the whole political riddle. From his window he looked on a workers' procession. He understood it now. "For nearly two hours I stood there and watched with bated breath the tremendous human serpent winding past." Hate turned

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to passion and almost to mania. These Jews were everywhere. "The black-haired Jew boy, with satanic joy in his face, for hours on end lies in wait for the unsuspecting girl, whom he pollutes with his blood." Who was the Gentile whose girl was stolen? Was it Hitler himself?

It all fitted precisely into the same picture. The jobs he wanted were stolen by Jewish painters and artists. The workers who hated him and whom he hated—they were led by Jews. According to the notions instilled by his schoolmaster and then enforced in the doss-house, it was the Jews who polluted the German race. The idea stamped itself on his mind with irrevocable certainty. All this was common tattle among a large section of the Austrian middle class, the class that he looked to. It stunned him with the impact of a grandiose and original idea. He had gained, as he said fifteen years later, "the granite basis of my present actions." His mind was moulded for ever. "I did not have to learn much," he boasted, "to add to what I then created for myself. I did not have to change anything." He had accepted all the crudest bestialities and prejudices of a degenerate middle class. He added to it all his own personal envies and hates. Add again the will which enabled him to cling fast to his faith until his own passions were mirrored in the minds of millions of Germans. It was a recipe to convulse the world.

He left Vienna. He escaped from the underworld. He arrived in Germany still with fierce loathing of that city in his heart. Now, twenty-six years later, he was riding back victorious. In the back alleys his henchmen were wreaking awful revenge on the enemies of his youth. Tortured Vienna deserved all the tributes he paid her that night. She had given him his gospel. She taught him unquenchable hate.

## II

Napoleon once asked why the price of salt had risen three sous in Marseilles, and stormed until he got an

answer. It was a revelation of his genius. The power of the man who held his empire for fifteen years against a world in arms was founded on the tireless industry of an artillery captain who spent precious nights and days making himself an expert in the practice of gunnery. The Bonaparte who became Napoleon was a master of detail. His mind was ordered, his body disciplined, his passions subdued, in the service of his dream. His brain was as carefully sorted as a card index. He commanded sleep at will.

How different is Hitler! He is a jumble of paradox. He disciplines a nation, and does not try to discipline himself. He extols the virtues of order and obedience, and is himself disorderly, haphazard, with the tastes of a wastrel. In action he hits at precisely the right point and at the supreme moment. In talk he meanders and misses. Compare the aphorisms of Napoleon, pungent, scintillating, direct, with the turgid ramblings of *Mein Kampf*. The contrast is staggering.

Hitler is lonely. All his life he has been lonely. The man who can conquer a crowd as no other in modern times has never found human contact easy or comfortable. At school they giped at him when he walked off alone in the fields talking to himself. In the bricklayers' yard in Vienna he sat apart from the others drinking his milk and eating his piece of bread. In the trenches it was the same. He never shared the routine grumblings of his companions. He stood aside, more against his will than in obedience to it. Throughout all the War years he never received a parcel from home. "Brandimoiir," he said once in a forlorn voice, handing over a letter, "I fancy your Trutschnelda has written to you again." When he returned from the War not one soul awaited him. His sisters in Vienna did not know where he was. He never wrote to them. He was not interested. Some years later, when he was growing famous, his sister Angela did come and keep house for him in Obersalzberg. She stayed until February 1936, and then left to get married.

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He did not pay her the courtesy of going to the wedding. Throughout the War years he carried in a locket on his breast a portrait of his mother. She was the only memory of his childhood that he wanted to keep—the mother who had always let him do what he wanted. The rest he hoped to forget, and when his political associates dared to ask him about his early life he shut them up instantly. It was the same with his Viennese friend Hanisch. He split with him because he had failed to get a proper fee for one of his paintings. His pride made him forfeit a true comrade. Hanisch lived on in Vienna, while Hitler rose to power in Germany. He never heard again from the man with whom he had shared his last hunk of bread. Hitler wanted no reminder of Vienna or of Braunau.

This loneliness stayed with him long after he had become a famous figure on the platform. It governed his behaviour when he was being lionized in sections of Munich society after the War. It made him awkward. He propounded a plan to hide his shyness and make himself noticed. He arrived at dinner late, talked volubly while he was there, and then left early so that the whole company was certain to chatter about him. Yet for all his growing confidence as the years passed he still had a longing at times for solitude. After days of endless talking he would go off to his mountain in Obersalzberg. For weeks and months the party might pester him for a decision. They got no answer.

Hitler is lazy, incurably lazy, to this day, with the indolence of a smouldering volcano. It was partly this indolence which made him detest the thought of becoming an official like his father. He felt sick and bored at the prospect of filling up forms. And as he grew older his horror of regular work grew fiercer. In Vienna, as soon as he had enough to keep himself from starvation, he clutched greedily at the chance of idleness and talk. Even when he had risen to supreme power it was the same Hitler. Anything to avoid the tedious business of detail. That is why he preferred Berchtesgaden to Berlin. He

was far away from the grind of administration. Here he would brood and, when he wanted, talk endlessly of his great political theories. Here he could stride off across his Bavarian hills, his only form of sport, and watch for hours on end at his private cinema. In *Mein Kampf* he prescribes "steel hardening" by means of athletics, and denounces the cinema as a "hothouse of sexual whims and allurements." But these precepts are for Germany, not for himself. He has a substitute for hard reading. He picks the brains of those who come with information with sharp questions. In a few minutes he has squeezed all out of them that he wants. Then he talks without stopping for hours.

He is sleepless. That is the plague of his life. For months before he makes a big decision he may be tortured by doubts and fears. He tosses on his bed. Often sometimes for nights on end his light burns until six or seven in the morning. He finds it hard to go to sleep, and harder still to get up. Then suddenly he jerks himself from his sloth, dashes to Berlin, works at fever pitch for solid days, fires out orders which may mean the rolling of more heads in the sand, or in days to come the shattering of yet another frontier. And if for the moment there is no map to redraw, no victim to strike down, he is off at a breakneck speed in his car or aeroplane.

His brooding and spasmodic energy make Hitler an eccentric. Yet here is the paradox. In his appearance and culture he often appears conventional and respectable to the point of banality. His features betray little of his power. The face for half the time seems incapable of expression. Badly shaped nose, thin lips, retreating forehead, scrubby moustache—not even the small shining eyes nor the lock of hair add any promise of distinction. It is certainly not a face that you would turn round and look at in a crowd. Only the well-shaped hands, hands unused to any form of manual labour, show anything out of the ordinary. The dress completes the impression of middle-class respectability. Collar and tie are neat and

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correct, and the rest you do not notice. Dorothy Thompson went to see him before he became dictator. She was struck by the sight of *bourgeois* refinement. "I bet he crooks his little finger when he has his tea," she said. His taste in clothes follows closely his taste in art. In architecture, one of his most genuine interests, he does not like originality or strength; he likes polish, smoothness, fake classical embellishments. If it had been his culture more than his will which made him the hero of half Germany the sign of his party should be not a swastika, but an aspidistra. He mirrored the artistic tastes, as well as the hates and ambitions, of the German middle class. He knew precisely their feelings and prejudices. They were his own. He retains almost exactly that outlook on culture which would have been his had his father made him an official.

Lonely, lazy, conventional: this is the Hitler that might have been if he had never learned to hate, if he had never had his passion for talk and his political urge. Yet despite his loneliness he became perhaps the greatest master of the mob the world has ever seen. Despite his laziness he managed to galvanize himself into activity to gain the throne of an emperor. Despite his love of convention he broke to fragments a whole society. How was it done? What attributes did he have in such measure that none could match him? His tastes, his hates, his passions, were those of a great mass of Germans whose support was required. His peculiar debased form of oratory was suited superbly to his purpose. His political machine was an amazing feat of organization, although here he owed much to his rich friends, to Captain Roehm, and the others, for there is plenty of evidence of his capacity to bungle detail when he put his hand to it. There must be something more.

### III

The secret lies in Hitler's pre-eminence as a political technician. In this department his talent was of a totally

different order from that of any of his contemporaries. Despite the slovenly working of his brain, the sheer tedium of his general political philosophy, the musty, moth-eaten banality of the ideas he picked up in Vienna, he yet had the genius to sift all that he heard gabbled about him and extract from it a technique sharp, superbly effective, and in some respects utterly original. It was this combination that made him and his party—the combination of a mastery over the arts of democracy with a complete contempt for its content, as if a horde of gorillas by some trick of training had established a control so expert over all the most intricate and essential instruments of science that no human could compete.

Much of the technique, of course, was old; here Hitler's genius consisted in his capacity to assemble it while he was still a beggar in Vienna or a private in the Army. He understood the necessity to shed all scruple, sentiment, or other interest in the pursuit of power. This understanding he shared with most previous tyrants in history, but Hitler's contribution was to reduce treachery to a science and raise perjury to an art. Napoleon lied and betrayed; but there is nothing so black in his record as Hitler's murder and abuse of an old comrade like Captain Roehm only a month after he had been showering love and praise upon him, and purely for a political purpose which might have been gained with a little thought by other means. Next he understood the need for drilling one idea endlessly and persistently into the mind of the mass, for debasing the argument to its lowest level—indeed, for excluding all argument and always presenting his case as something undebatable and obvious. These precepts in a milder form were already the property of the advertising and journalistic professions, and before them of the Catholic Church; Hitler's genius was that he comprehended more completely than any before him their adaptability to politics.

Next from this start he was able to disentangle the whole apparatus of mob psychology, take it to pieces,

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put it together again, see how it worked, and use it for his own designs. "Burn into the little man's soul," he said, "the proud conviction that, though a little worm, he is nevertheless part of a great dragon." A thousand group movements, from the Boy Scouts to the Buchmanites, have employed the same principle; Hitler did it consciously with an adopted nation instead of an adopted university for his field. "Inspire men to die," he said, instead, for instance, of offering them pensions and solid political hopes; thus with deliberation he dealt in illusions, with sober calculation he peddled dreams, fanaticism, and even hysteria. "You did not lose the War, you won it"—a successful paradox that Chesterton never equalled. "Not down with France, but down with the November criminals at home"; a brilliant twist which few of the soldier enemies of Weimar could comprehend, for they shrieked both slogans, enabling the Weimarites to escape on the claim that they too were battling against France. "Appeal for the support of those classes whose existence is threatened; secure the favour of institutions already powerful in the State." These last were old ideas indeed, which Mussolini used before him, but where did Hitler get them? Not in the years when he dealt with Schleicher and von Papen, not in the earlier days of hard experience in Munich, not even in the trenches, but 'way back in a lecture hall in Vienna. Here he had listened to a not very eminent leader of the Viennese *bourgeoisie*. Hitler at the time was a down-and-out with no more use for a sense of political tactics than a tramp who sleeps on the Embankment. Yet the knowledge was noted, remembered, and subsequently resurrected to change the face of Germany.

Such, then, was the store of political dynamite which he had accumulated by the age of thirty-five. Most of it was not fresh; some of it had already shown its explosive power in other places, even in previous centuries. Hitler's achievement was to bring it all together and stack it in one pile. And then, most strange of all, he



sat down in his comfortable gaol in Landsberg in 1923 and reviewed the whole arsenal. It was not an orderly analysis; he had neither the brains nor the education to work, think, or talk in an organized sequence. Yet the result was *Mein Kampf*, the most cynical assessment of ambitions and strategy which any famous politician has ever put on paper. Most others wait until the evening of their lives to excuse their crimes in print and to attribute guiding principles to their actions which in fact at the time were purely empirical. Hitler, in the morning of his career, before his name was even known outside the frontiers of Germany, proclaimed his criminal and grandiose intentions to the world, and announced for the benefit of his opponents the technique which he intended to employ to gain his ends. There has been nothing like it before in the sphere of politics; the only parallel is to be found among those gangsters of fiction who go to the labour of informing the police which house they intend to raid on which day and at which particular time. Had the plan not succeeded anyone reading *Mein Kampf* years later would have condemned it as sheer buffoonery. The fact that until Hitler had become a world figure no one discovered the brilliance buried amid all the palaver in its pages is convincing proof of the man's towering skill in the more sordid arts of politics. There is a story told of him at the time he left the military hospital in Pasewalk in 1919 with nothing noticeably to his credit in his thirty years of existence. He himself alleges that he decided at this moment "to become a politician." Most of the autobiographical details in *Mein Kampf* are sheer fabrications. This we must believe. He carried in his head a greater familiarity with the mechanism whereby men are governed than if he had read all the political philosophers of the ages. He knew the business like the back of his hand. Perhaps the only man who has approached his attainments in this capacity was Lloyd George; and he was prevented from using the skill for such despicable purposes by his saving sense

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of humour, his genuine feeling for the under-dog, his healthy contempt for financiers, and his wholly admirable hatred for landowners.

One further item, more important than all the others, must be added to this total of political weapons. It is the grand strategy which guided their use, and it is made up of two elements so paradoxical that their combination must be regarded as sheer originality. Conquerors and statesmen of all ages have understood the necessity of dividing their enemies. Hitler, of course, used this tactic both in the political field before he came to power and, even more spectacularly, in the diplomatic field. Any recital here of the total number of occasions on which the trick has been worked in precisely the same manner would be tedious. How many of the politicians of Germany were bamboozled by it before 1932? How many wedges have been driven down into the Balkans since that day? How many times has London been divided from Paris precisely according to Hitler's plan? The catalogue is gargantuan. But Hitler's achievement was to add to this device, supremely wielded, another of greater subtlety. While he gulled his enemies with the assurance that all who were not against him were with him, he united his friends, his party, and his country with the cry that "All who are not with us are against us." "It is part of the brilliance of a great leader," he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "to make even opponents who are very far from one another seem in reality to belong to one and the same camp, because to a weak and vacillating people the recognition of different enemies leads easily to the beginning of doubts about their own rightness." That principle has governed the whole of Hitler's domestic propaganda. He gathered together all the petty hates and irritations of the German people—the financiers who had soaked them in the inflation, the politicians who had accepted Versailles without kicking hard enough, the employers who sacked them from their jobs, each real or supposed or fabricated enemy of the German—

amalgamated them in one mess, gave the result the physiognomy of a Bolshevik Jew, and said, "Punch that on the nose and you will be saved." No need to devise separate plans for dealing with specific evils. *One punch against one enemy.* That more than the slogan, "One Reich, one people," was the tactic he used to gain power. And ever since 1932 the same tactic has been employed. Mr Eden was not labelled a Bolshevik because Prussians are crude and Dr Goebbels stupid, but rather because the Doctor is Hitler's cleverest disciple. At that moment the one enemy happened to be Bolshevism; any other enemies had to conform to the pattern; democracy even in the most capitalist guise was lumped with the Reds. By these means Germany was permanently incited against a single opponent from whom all evil flowed. The technique was not wholly new. Hitler did consciously on a grander scale what others had done instinctively. He had mastered the whole art. Picture him, for instance, in the year 1931, intriguing behind closed doors in turn with the industrialists, the Reichswehr, and the Junkers; by these means opposition was sapped with dissension. Picture him the same night on the platform announcing that the concrete block of the Nazi party (a miscellaneous collection of nondescripts) would batter its way to power without compromise with the old parties, who were nothing more than diseased parts of the same whole. His intrigues in the ante-chamber made nonsense of his claims on the hustings, but still he did it. Picture him finally eight years earlier dissecting the machine which later worked so smoothly. It is the portrait of a man who understood politics as only a sanitary engineer understands sewers, but who at the same time lacked the sanitary engineer's saving sense of duty or smell.

None can underrate Hitler as a politician. Yet not his hates, not his utter lack of scruple, not his contemptible meanness, not his shallow, cheap culture, not even his terrific political acumen, can explain the whole, or even half, the story of his rise to power and his delirious

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diplomatic success for six subsequent years. The Greeks maintained that it was the slaves who made the tyrants, not the tyrants the slaves. So it was with Hitler in the affairs both of Germany and Europe. His opponents on the Left in Germany were disunited and pusillanimous, while those on the Right played his game with unflinching persistence. Europe's statesmen followed suit. Hitler by his politics had introduced new weapons. It was not beyond the wit of men to discover the antidote. They failed in a manner which, in the Navy for instance, might have secured court-martial for those responsible. Time after time British and French statesmen sent out their diplomatic argosies only to see them exploded by Hitler's magnetic mines of bluff, blackmail, and faked peace offers. Can we be surprised if after so many successes Hitler should have come to believe that the weapon was unbeatable? Such a conclusion he did, in fact, reach at some moment between the conquest of Austria and the pillage of Poland. "Germany," says Georges Duhamel, "has made of Chancellor Hitler a great German. But that is not all! The whole of Europe has collaborated in the magnification. . . . Let the men of the west pat themselves on the back; they have all contributed in some manner towards the enthronement of the demon genius."

A new quality was added to his character, something more dangerous to the world than any instilled by nature and upbringing, something whose horrific dimensions grew day by day after that triumphal entry into Vienna. Busy politicians from the four corners of the globe, among them the representatives of the mightiest nations, had assembled at Versailles in 1919. They had carved Europe to suit their whim, erected new frontiers in a night, and decreed for all time the future of mankind. They had signed their treaties, made their perorations, and gone back to their homes. Germany at last was bound in shackles of steel. This man was then a poor soldier, convalescing on a hospital bed in Pasewalk, later an

insignificant Army espionage agent in Munich, without a friend, without a home, surviving on the pittance which the German Army paid him to pry into the politics of his countrymen. Now with four or five blows from his fist he cracked the edifice of treaties, pledges, guarantees, and covenants to oblivion. He had the heirs of Versailles scurrying to do him favours. He had seen them wilt before his scowl. Just occasionally a voice was raised in protest. Again he raised his fist and they scattered in confusion. How unavailing their feeble gestures against his hammer-blows! And before him on the wall he could always see the monument to his prowess, fashioned by his own bold strokes in defiance of every other statesman in Europe or at least with their cringing connivance—a map redrawn according to the design of a coffee-house politician who nineteen years earlier had slouched through the *cafés* of Munich, waiting till the talk turned to politics, and then rising to his feet and shouting of a Germany reborn, rearmed, and conquering the world.

For twenty-five years he had known poverty, ignominy, ridicule, defeat. Then he hacked his way to power across the bruised and broken bodies of his enemies. A huge mound of victims, of families without a home, of little children robbed of their fathers by the executioner's axe or their own hands, of men huddled into prison camps of torture and death—this was the litter he had left in his trail, the sacrifice on the altar of his great, exultant idea, eighty million people welded into one iron armament of war. Thus he has trampled on, oblivious to all those rights which poets and philosophers have fathomed of love, laughter, friendship, and human delight, oblivious because nothing must curb his power and his aim. For years he tasted nothing but triumph. On his enemies in his own land had been imposed the silence of the prison and the grave. And in the affairs of the world no sound came to his ears but the tramp of victory to a tune of thunder. Six years of poverty, six years of insignificance, six years an agitator, six years a party hero, growing in

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power on the platform and acclaimed by the mob, then years of unexampled success in the politics of Europe, conquests without battle, a continent hinged on his word and shaped by his imperious demands; no other single factor was allowed to count in the mind of Adolf Hitler beside this glittering parade of triumph.

This was the fatal trait which the statesmen of Europe implanted squarely in Hitler's brain. The men who did it were the realists, the same who had believed ever since Versailles that no other element but force and the display of force should be allowed to settle the affairs of nations. Because they only respected force they smote Germany when she was civilized but weak, and grovelled before her when she became barbarian but strong. Because they derided the idea of law between states, because they scorned those who pleaded that human suffering and human sentiment should play some part in the determination of policy, they discovered in the end that they had raised a god magnified from their own image. Because they would not defend law in Abyssinia and Austria or decency in Spain and China, they found at last that the god they had erected had gained the ambition to challenge all liberty and all civilization, even in isolated England.

In any portrait of the Nazi monster we must not forget the hands that fed him. Even the lions at the Zoo would assume a jungle aspect if the keeper occasionally flung them human flesh to maul.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MURDER BY COMMITTEE

It would have been strange indeed if Theodosius had purchased, by the loss of honour, a secure and solid tranquillity, or if his tameness had not invited the repetition of injuries.

EDWARD GIBBON, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

We began to throw out lures, oglings, and glances for peace.

EDMUND BURKE, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*

WHAT chance was there for the peace and liberty of Europe in March 1938? Nazi Germany, with her engineers working overtime along the Siegfried Line, had just struck her deadliest blow in the south-east. Every Balkan state suffered from the impact of the seizure of Austria. Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece, none of them free countries in a Liberal sense, had moved within the German orbit, while they sought with difficulty to constrain the Nazi elements in their midst. Czecho-Slovakia still held her head erect, but was watchful. Poland balanced on the fence between a German and a French alliance; she was noiselessly slipping towards the Nazi side. Farther east was Soviet Russia, which in the first hours after the march into Vienna had proposed a conference of all Powers prepared to concert measures against aggression; her project had been contemptuously refused. At the other end of the Axis Rome spread another ever-widening circle of diplomatic disturbance. In the east Turkey stood fast and unshaken, refortifying the Dardanelles in anticipation of any assault. In all the cities of the Levant, across the sands of Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt, among the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, Mussolini sang his siren tunes announcing himself as the Protector of Islam. In Africa itself Italian soldiers sweated and

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strained in the hills of Abyssinia to achieve the conquest which half the world had already recognized. And to the west General Franco was seeking to pile up enough foreign guns to conquer that half of Spain where much more than half her people were huddled.

Here, then, were the essentials in the European picture. Germany was striking east and south, but success depended on her capacity to distract France from her eastern interest; that purpose was being secured in Spain. Italy was hoping to extort concessions by her growing power for blackmail in the Mediterranean; that purpose too was being served in Spain. Germany and Italy knew that their threats were more than doubled in strength when they acted in unison; therefore they acted together in Spain. Victory for them on Spanish ground would mean another French frontier in jeopardy, submarine bases confronting the Atlantic trade routes, a new alignment of influence in the Mediterranean. Defeat for them in Spain would shake Mussolini's throne, and even have its effect as far away as Berlin. Therefore Spain was the key. And if moral considerations may be allowed to complicate strategy the conclusion was the same. The Spanish Government was democratically elected; it had been fighting valiantly against Fascist rebels backed and directed from Rome and Berlin. The square of territory which it ruled was free soil, all the more precious because so many millions of acres had been trodden down by the conquerors in the previous three years. Spain had every claim on the conscience and interest of the Western democracies of Britain and France. Behind this rampart the peace and what remained of the liberty of Europe could be defended with success. The invaders could be driven back to the sea. The Fascist *régimes* could be made to smart from their first defeat. Upon the basis of the victory gained here a great assembly of nations could be gathered to overawe the aggressors. Czecho-Slovakia could be saved. The Balkans could swing back to the side of superior strength.



Poland could withdraw her head from the noose before it was too late. No Power, not even Soviet Russia, would be attracted to make a private bargain with the common foe better to serve her own security; for each would reckon the power of such a combination as overwhelming, and each could be given visible proof by action in Spain that the aim of the combination was in fact to vindicate the rights of democracy and uphold the freedom of small states. All this was still a chance in March 1938; weakened, it is true, by three earlier years of pusillanimity, but none the less possible. It was only required that Britain and France should recognize Germany and Italy as the enemies and the Spanish Republic as the essential friend.

The misfortune of Europe at this critical hour was the Government of Britain. It looked out on these affairs on the Continent and saw Germany and Italy as potential friends and Spain, if not as an enemy, at least as an inconvenient obstacle to that friendship. This was the picture traced by Mr Chamberlain in the debate in February 1938 when Mr Eden resigned. He announced then that the peace of Europe would depend on the collaboration between the four Powers, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. In the same breath he settled the fate of Spain, for his willingness to sign a treaty with Italy demonstrated that no quarrel would be allowed with her on account of her breaches of the Non-intervention Agreement. Mr Chamberlain's policy, therefore, in that March of 1938 was based on three emphatic principles. He had decided to sabotage any grouping of non-aggressive Powers to confront the aggressors; he preferred to rely on the goodwill of the dictators; and to secure it he was ready to barter the liberties of Spain. What motives guided this policy it is not possible to determine. It may be that he really believed in the pacific intentions of the dictators; it may be that he cared more for the survival of dictatorship in Italy than the survival of democracy in Spain; it may even be that he was

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hoping to buy Italy out of the Axis. This last explanation, so popular among the 'realists,' is the most uncharitable of all; for within two months Mussolini was flaunting his association with Hitler in the face of all Europe, within three months he was using the treaty with Britain to embarrass our ally France, within six months by his distraction in the Mediterranean he had performed essential service to Hitler's conquest of Czecho-Slovakia, while to-day only the most amenable courtiers of the Conservative Central Office can suppose that Mr Chamberlain's kind words, rather than Germany's treaty with Russia and sheer self-interest, have prevented Mussolini from acting in concert with Hitler against us. To attribute this motive is unjust; Mr Chamberlain made no distinction between the dictators in the distribution of his favours. We must conclude that in his tabulation of the forces which could help to secure peace he must have placed a high value on the word of the dictators and a low value on the rights of Spaniards. The question of his motives is, at any rate, now no more than academic. For by a natural coincidence neither the freedom of Spain nor the peace of Europe still exists.

### II

Some account has already been given of the immediate events which followed Mr Eden's resignation and Mr Chamberlain's declaration of policy in February 1938. Austria fell. Franco launched his offensive on the Aragon front. And throughout the month of March negotiations continued for a treaty between Britain and Italy. The avowed purpose of this pact was to stabilize the *status quo* in the Mediterranean and to secure from Mussolini a pledge to call off his anti-British propaganda in this

Many months before on the Non-intervention Committee the British Government had proposed a plan for the proportionate withdrawal of volunteers from both sides in Spain. The Italian Government had persistently opposed, or at least placed obstacles in the way of, the acceptance of this plan. A few days after Mr Eden's resignation, however, they agreed. Mr Chamberlain was able to state in the House of Commons that he had told Count Grandi, the Italian Ambassador, "it was essential it should not be possible, if we went to the League to recommend the approval of the agreement, for it to be said that the situation in Spain had been materially altered by Italy, either by sending fresh reinforcements to Franco or by failing to implement the arrangements contemplated by the British formula." "I was convinced," added Mr Chamberlain, "that once the conversations had started we should find good effects of the new atmosphere in many places, and notably in Spain." Here, then, was one answer to the question of what was discussed in Rome; Mussolini had agreed to withdraw his troops from Spain according to the British formula as part of the price for a treaty with Britain.

On the other hand, another answer to the same question was given by Lord Halifax in the House of Lords eight months later. "Signor Mussolini," he said, "has always made it plain *from the time of the first conversations between His Majesty's Government and the Italian Government* that, for reasons known to us all—whether we approve of them or not—he was not prepared to see General Franco defeated. He has always made it plain, on the other hand, that he would assist, as he has been assisting, the work of the Non-intervention Committee."

There is a discrepancy, therefore, between the historical data supplied by Mr Chamberlain in the House of Commons and Lord Halifax in the House of Lords. For no one could take the promise of withdrawals seriously if at the same time Mussolini was asserting that on no account would he allow Franco to be defeated.

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Withdrawals, in short, were quite openly made dependent, not on the letter of his agreement with Britain, but on the state of Franco's arms on the battlefield. This was Lord Halifax's account of what took place in Rome during the negotiations which preceded the treaty. We must accept his account rather than Mr Chamberlain's, for all the subsequent events tallied with it. At the end of April the Spanish rebel chief published a detailed report of the part played by Italian legionaries in the Aragon offensive. At the same time the *Times* correspondent in Spain reported that "newly arrived Italian forces" had aided Franco in his drive to the sea. Some months later, despite the fact that the Spanish Government had accepted the British withdrawals formula, and despite the fact that it was even putting it into practice, General Franco rejected the formula with the approval of Italy. At the same time even the British representative in Rome was compelled to confront the Italian Government with charges of renewed intervention, which it did not dare or care to refute. By Halifax's own admission, by the subsequent actions of Italy in Spain, by her brazen avowal of those actions, by the lighthearted jettisoning of the withdrawals plan, it is incontrovertibly proved that Mussolini agreed to the Anglo-Italian pact on the explicit understanding that he should be allowed to murder the Spanish Republic in a corner.

This was the last act in the drama of Spain. The rest was only a nightmare epilogue. On the 15th of April Franco reached the sea. On the 16th the Anglo-Italian treaty was initialled in Rome. On the 19th Franco announced that the war had been won. It was the truth. Many brave men would still prefer death to his victory. Sliced in half by an Italian cutlass, the body of the Republic would still through agonizing months betray a quiver of life. More British sailors were yet to be sunk sailing food to Spanish ports. More feats of deathless courage were yet to be added to Spain's scroll of glory. More epitaphs were to be spoken inside the

hollow walls of Geneva. Yet not all this human effort and suffering would alter the decision reached in Rome. The epic was over. Italy had asserted and Britain had agreed that Franco should never be allowed to suffer defeat. Mussolini understood that he could have his victory; none but the disarmed workers of Spain would ever be permitted to stand athwart his path.

By this act Mr Chamberlain had achieved the first item in his design for appeasement. Spain had been bartered. Never again need that issue divide Italy and Britain. Mr Chamberlain was jubilant at the triumph. In a debate on the 2nd of May he extended his approval of Mussolini's policy from foreign to domestic affairs. "To-day," he said, "there is a new Italy, an Italy which under the stimulus of the personality of Signor Mussolini is showing a new vigour [*cries of "In Spain"*] in the measures which they are taking to improve the conditions of the people." In that same debate he spoke with satisfaction of the general prospect for the future. "I myself am encouraged," he said, "by what has happened to hope that we have taken only the first step towards a healthier and saner state of things in Europe."

That night in Rome hectic preparations were being made for the biggest circus ever organized by the master showman whose vigour Mr Chamberlain so much applauded. A new railway-station had been constructed, and outside it a giant new road had been built leading to a giant new stage in a brand-new Colosseum. Somewhere in the city an orchestra practised *Lohengrin*, and somewhere else Herr Himmler, of the Gestapo, was engaged in anxious conversation with Mussolini's police chief. The Roman gaols were cleared of ordinary convicts, and in their place a few thousand political gabblers were installed for a week's imprisonment. Everywhere there were flags and bunting and fireworks and music. The whole business, so it was said, cost not less than four million pounds. And who was to be hero of this riotous party? For a moment you might suppose that it was done

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in honour of Lord Perth, the British Ambassador in Rome, who had gained for Mussolini a pact with Britain. You would be wrong. The hero was Adolf Hitler, who had just planted German troops across the Brenner and sent a shiver of fear down the whole length of Italy. Mussolini respected, not appeasement, but force; he withheld his junketings from those who stroked his jaw, and accorded them solely to the man who had kicked his posterior. Together for four days the two dictators discussed *their* view of how steps could be taken towards "a healthier and saner state of affairs in Europe." Rumour said that the topic was Czecho-Slovakia.

Mr Chamberlain was undismayed. He turned to the next item on the appeasement agenda. Before any could say that peace was firmly established a certain amount of diplomatic rubbish would have to be cleared off the table into the wastepaper-basket. The ceremony fittingly took place at Geneva. Haile Selassie was there, inconveniently claiming that Abyssinia was still at war with Italy. He was answered by Lord Halifax, who put the moral argument. "When, as here," he said, "two ideals are in conflict—on the one hand the ideal of devotion, unflinching but unpractical, to some high purpose; on the other the ideal of a practical victory for peace—I cannot doubt that the stronger claim is that of peace." Against that Haile Selassie could only mutter that the League was "committing suicide"; only four nations, New Zealand, Bolivia, China, and Russia, opposed the recognition of Mussolini's triumph. Next on the list came China. Her delegate petitioned for aid against invading Japan. None was granted. Finally there was Spain. Her delegate rose to protest against the Italian treaty and to demand the operation of the resolution passed unanimously in the previous year whereby the Great Powers had agreed to reconsider non-intervention. Britain and France voted against him, only Russia with him.

Thus the board was swept clean. Three wars were being waged; none of them had succeeded in upsetting

the policy of peace. On that 14th of May, in Geneva of all places, appeasement had celebrated its first and most glorious triumph. Japan should be satisfied. Germany should be satisfied. Italy should be satisfied. Each could not have done better if they had still been members of the League. They would not go to the mountain. The mountain had come to them. No obstacle was left to solid agreement between London and Rome. All such ugly issues as law and covenants and sanctions were finished. Lord Halifax had introduced into the atmosphere of Geneva something of his own high piety. All had gone according to Mr Chamberlain's plan. France had bowed to his suggestion. Almost all the others, including Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, had voted for the extinction of the two other small states. The voices of Spain and China and Abyssinia had been snuffed out like burnt candles. Everything was settled. Peace was enthroned.

This happy period of triumph for the policy of appeasement lasted about six hours by the clock. For that night news came through to the delegates in Geneva of a speech which Mussolini had delivered at Genoa. Its chief note was a strident attack on France. "When those beyond the mountains," he sneered, "committed the dismal stupidity of recalling what Italy had done in 1934 [*i.e.*, in defence of Austria, which was now German] I can reply that much water since then has flowed under the bridges of the Tiber, the Danube, the Thames, and also the Seine." Friendship between Italy and France, he said, was difficult because in Spain they "were on opposite sides of the barricades." This was a wretched reward for the miserable M. Bonnet, Foreign Minister of France, who had persuaded the French Government to recognize the conquest of Abyssinia, to approve the Anglo-Italian treaty, and to keep the French frontier to Spain closed as far as possible against the passage of arms to the Republic. M. Bonnet expressed his "surprise" at Mussolini's speech. The reply was most undiplomatic. Rome demanded the French colony of Tunis.

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So the policy of appeasement had not succeeded after all; it could only be salvaged by more appeasement. Britain had "secured" Italian friendship, not at the expense of Spain and Abyssinia alone, but at the diplomatic expense also of her ally France. Nor had the Axis been in any sense loosened; it was soldered. By his threats "across the mountains" and his steady subjugation of Spain Mussolini deflected French interest from Eastern Europe, and enabled Hitler and one of his henchmen called Henlein to prepare the way for the greatest humiliation France had suffered since the soldiers of Bismarck and von Moltke marched unmolested beneath shuttered windows up the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe.



## CHAPTER XV

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The Turk crossed over the way, and with perfect goodwill gave him two or three lusty kicks on the seat of honour. To resent or to return the compliment in Turkey was quite out of the question. Our traveller, since he could not otherwise acknowledge this kind of favour, received it with the best grace in the world—he made one of his most ceremonious bows, and begged the kicking Mussalman “to accept his perfect assurances of high consideration.” Our countryman was too wise to imitate Othello in the use of the dagger. He thought it better, as better it was, to assuage his bruised dignity with half a yard square of balmy diplomatic diachylon. In the disasters of their friends, people are seldom wanting in a laudable patience.

EDMUND BURKE, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*

The incapacity of a weak and distracted Government may often assume the appearance, and produce the effects, of a treasonable correspondence with the public enemy. If Alaric himself had been introduced into the councils of Ravenna, he would have advised the same measures which were actually pursued by the ministers of Honorius.

EDWARD GIBBON, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

GERMANY's road to dominion in Europe was blocked by the mountains of Bohemia. After Austria had fallen before Hitler's onslaught in March 1938 no force of any consequence intervened between the growing Reich and the confines of Russia, the waters of the Black Sea, and Turkey, sentinel of the Bosphorus, but this towering obstacle of rock, munition, and entrenchment. Poland ordered her policy largely according to the dictate from Berlin; Hungary was Hitler's vassal; Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Bulgaria had all swung perceptibly under German influence. None of these states was truly democratic; more important still, none possessed fortified lines of defence. Each, therefore, was highly vulnerable to the new Nazi technique of propaganda; each was laid bare to the traditional German military strategy of movement and surprise. Bohemia alone stood between him

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and a Middle European empire greater even than the Kaiser had ever subdued; for in the old days Habsburg power was able to balance, if not always to contest, Hohenzollern ambition. Yet Bohemia was no inconsiderable stumbling-block. According to Bismarck, she was "a fortress built by God Himself." According to Clemenceau and a long line of subsequent French statesmen, this natural bastion could be fortified as a chief and almost impregnable barrier against the reassertion of German hegemony in Europe. This purpose had been achieved by twenty years of French labour, and even the exposure of Bohemia's flank by the seizure of Austria did not render stout defence impossible. For behind the bastion stood a Liberal nation ruled by statesmen. With French aid she had built a strong army of forty divisions, well disciplined and equipped. Under the guidance of Thomas Masaryk and Edward Beneš she had held aloft democratic principles while in every other Eastern European state parliamentary government had foundered in intrigue, corruption, and petty dictatorship. Her heavy industries, already strong, had been expanded; she was the sixth industrial state in Europe, producing more equipment for war than the major Power Italy. All this must have made the nation of Czecho-Slovakia formidable in the sight of Germany even as a single opponent; but she possessed another asset which made her yet more impressive. France was committed to defend her territorial integrity by sentiment, honour, interest, and treaty. Britain was linked to France, and, in the phrase of British diplomacy, "could not disinterest herself in the affairs of Eastern Europe." Finally, Russia was pledged to aid Czecho-Slovakia at the moment when France was summoned to discharge her obligations. Those mountains of Bohemia, therefore, did in fact provide the clue to more than one essential problem of Europe. They were the last reminder of French hegemony established at Versailles. They were the links in the friendship between Paris and Moscow, asserted after the

rise of Hitlerism in Germany. They provided the toughest physical bulwark against the extension of Nazi power across the whole of Eastern Europe. Consequently with the collapse of Austria it was understood in every land that if another Nazi challenge were to come Bohemia must be the first target. Berlin understood, for to allay disquiet the German pledge of respect for the frontiers of Czecho-Slovakia was reaffirmed. Paris understood: her pledge to defend Czecho-Slovakia was restated with unmistakable emphasis. Moscow understood, and acted in the same manner. London understood too. In the House of Commons heavy pressure was exerted by the Opposition parties in the hope that Britain would give an undertaking to defend the frontiers of Czecho-Slovakia as specific as that bestowed by France. The demand was quite as specifically rejected. But that was not all. "His Majesty's Government," said Mr Chamberlain, "take note of, and in no way underrate, the definite assurances given by the German Government regarding their attitude." He had to remind Herr Hitler that if war broke out "it would be quite impossible to say where it would end." Thus in March 1938 Hitler was faced with a terrific obstacle to any further excursion; first, a natural rampart of forest and mountain; next a Czech army which could engage sixty German divisions before it was smashed; next an alliance between Russia and France, linked by this same fortress; finally Britain in the background hinting that in certain circumstances she might be compelled to buttress the Bohemian barrier with all her strength on sea and land and air.

Against this mighty array Hitler possessed one asset. Included in Czecho-Slovakia were three and a quarter million Germans. They had been incorporated in the new nation at Versailles not merely because they inhabited the mountain district which alone could give to the Czechs a defensible frontier, but also because their trade flowed towards Prague rather than over the mountains towards the Reich. They had never been citizens of Germany,

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but Versailles none the less changed their status. Before 1914 they had formed a favoured section in the Habsburg Empire, lording it over the unhappy Czechs. Naturally the reversal of status aroused bitterness. Naturally, too, it was beyond the magnanimity of even the statesmen in Prague readily to remove the resentment caused by this loss of privilege, although few would dispute that the German minority in Sudetenland was better treated than any other minority in Europe. It was on this minority that Hitler relied to form a wedge sufficient, with his backing, to heave over the whole Bohemian fortress. With that purpose in view he had established contact with a young Sudeten German called Konrad Henlein as far back as 1935. Henlein was instructed to build a Nazi party among his three million Germans. In the three years that followed he did so successfully, although many of the three million, some of them Jews, some of them Socialists, some of them Liberals, immensely preferred the tolerant rule of Prague to the terror which they knew would come in Hitler's wake. Henlein himself had always repudiated the charge that he desired Sudetenland to be incorporated, like Austria, in the Reich. This demand did not figure in the programme which he issued a month after the conquest of Austria. He claimed then, in a famous speech at Karlsbad, local self-government for the German minority, together with the right to suppress Jews and political opponents within the Germanic area and the abrogation of Czecho-Slovakia's treaties of alliance with France and Russia. In regard to the first, Prague was already promising substantial concessions. The other demands no Government in Prague other than a Nazi vassal could accept.

Here, then, was deadlock. President Beneš would not yield as Schuschnigg had done. Some other path must be found over the mountain barrier which stood between Hitler and his ambition. If the Czechs were unyielding, what was the strength of their allies? With the purpose of testing the weakest link in the chain of

alliance which stretched from Moscow *via* Bohemia and Paris to London, Henlein came to England to meet British statesmen. He talked with Mr Winston Churchill and Sir Archibald Sinclair, who warned him that Britain could not be disinterested in a violation of Czecho-Slovakian independence. To them he replied that such an aim formed no part of the Sudeten programme. Other talks in London gave him a different impression. He understood that Britain would not fight in defence of an Eastern European state. That information was conveyed to Berchtesgaden. It confirmed the view so insistently offered by Herr Hitler's chief adviser on foreign affairs, Herr von Ribbentrop. Two days later another item of news reached the Fuehrer, *via* America, from a newspaper correspondent in London. A luncheon party had taken place in London at which Mr Chamberlain had been present. An unfortunate leakage had occurred, for the London correspondent of the New York *Herald-Tribune* wrote that he was

now privileged to shed what can truly be called official light on the real British attitude. . . . Nothing seems clearer than that the British do not expect to fight for Czecho-Slovakia, and do not anticipate that Russia and France will either. That being so, the Czechs must accede to the German demands, if reasonable.

There followed a description of what this reasonable demand might be. Quoting his official source, the newspaper correspondent said:

Instead of cantonization, frontier revision might be advisable. This would entail moving the frontier back for some miles to divorce this outer fringe from Prague and marry it to Berlin. A smaller but sounder Czecho-Slovakia would result.

A day or two after receiving that message Hitler acted. The German Press launched a bitter campaign against the "bestial Czechs."

## II

Almost exactly four months later—on September 18, 1938—another luncheon party was held in London.

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Mr Chamberlain again was present. The guests were not American journalists; they were French statesmen. But the plan under discussion was almost exactly the same as that debated four months earlier.

Great changes in the European scene had taken place in the interval. The German Press had shrieked louder against the Czechs. Henlein had negotiated with the Czech Government. Lord Runciman had been sent from London to act as an unofficial mediator between the two parties. He had interviewed the Sudeten and the Czech leaders. Partly under his advice a new plan of concessions had been produced by the Czech Government. According to Lord Runciman, "it embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad eight points, and with a little clarification and extension could have been made to cover them entirely." That, however, had not been sufficient to settle the problem. On the 7th of September the *Times* newspaper in London had suggested that the Czech Government might be wise to cede to Germany "that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nations with which they are united by race." This suggestion had been repudiated by the British Government, but five days later Herr Hitler at Nuremburg had launched his fiercest attack on the Czechs, six days later Henlein had broken off all negotiations with the Czech Government, while disturbances grew in the Sudeten areas, "instigated," as Lord Runciman said, by the Henlein party. Tension had risen almost to breaking-point. At this critical moment Mr Chamberlain had startled the world by announcing that he was flying to Berchtesgaden to interview Herr Hitler. Here the British Premier, on his own account, had been presented with an ultimatum. He had been told that if the Sudeten areas were not handed over to the Reich they would be seized by force. Mr Chamberlain had returned to London and requested the presence of the French Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. All day on the 18th of September the British and French

Ministers debated the means whereby they could "divorce this outer fringe from Prague and marry it to Berlin."

They had not much time. Hitler was in a hurry. Mussolini was making threatening speeches. German legions were massing on the frontier. The Czech Ambassador called and presented a note reminding the negotiators that Czecho-Slovakia could accept no responsibility for action taken in her absence, and that the very life of the nation was at stake. But against this still, small voice of objection the negotiators could set the expert advice of Lord Runciman. He proposed a considerable advance on the terms suggested at a luncheon party in London four months earlier, and the ultimatum party in Berchtesgaden. His terms included, apart from the transference of the outer fringe, (1) a suppression of those parties and persons in Czecho-Slovakia encouraging a policy antagonistic to Czecho-Slovakia's neighbours, (2) a proposal that the Czecho-Slovakian Government should remodel her foreign policy so as to give assurances to her neighbours that she would in no circumstances attack them or enter into any aggressive action against them arising from obligations to other states, (3) a guarantee by the principal Powers of Europe for Czecho-Slovakia's new frontiers, and (4) a commercial treaty to be negotiated between Germany and Czecho-Slovakia. These suggestions, however, were apparently regarded by the British and French statesmen as too exacting. Some of them were excluded. Instead the Czech Government was informed that the interests of European peace demanded the immediate cession of all parts of their country mainly inhabited by Sudeten Germans. At the same time the British Government offered, "as a contribution to the pacification of Europe, to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czecho-Slovak state against unprovoked aggression." These proposals were dispatched to the Czech Government on the morning of the 19th of September.

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Prague was stunned. Her ally France and her friend Britain were proposing the cession of the Bohemian frontiers, which even Henlein had not demanded less than a fortnight previously. The answer, therefore, was emphatic. The Czech Government could not agree, "for the acceptance of such a proposal would amount to a voluntary and complete mutilation of the State in every respect." That reply was submitted to the British and French Ambassadors in Prague at 7.30 P.M. on the night of the 20th of September. Six and a half hours later the British and French Ambassadors in Prague awoke President Beneš from sleep in his room in the Hradcalny Palace. They informed him bluntly that his first answer would not do. The Anglo-French plan was not a suggestion. It was an ultimatum from Herr Hitler, delivered by the emissaries of Britain and France. If Czecho-Slovakia did not accept the proposed terms Britain would not march on her behalf, and France would not uphold her treaty. President Beneš called his Cabinet. At three o'clock in the morning of the 21st of September, with the plenipotentiaries of Britain and France harrying them for a decision, they sat down to settle the fate of their nation.

For twenty years Czecho-Slovakia had held its head high among the peoples of Europe. Thomas Masaryk, her founder, had gained fame throughout all Europe for the Liberal principles which he instilled in his state. Her democracy had been applauded, her tolerance acclaimed; this was a nation, so the world understood, which, having won her liberty through hard centuries of oppression, would henceforth guard the blessings of peace with the sword of freedom. Such, for twenty years, had been the resolve of the people of Czecho-Slovakia. On that cold grey morning of the 21st of September the resolve was undiminished. Outside the Hradcalny Palace a great crowd mustered, insisting that nothing should be yielded to the ravenous demands of the Reich. A plebiscite at that moment would have been a plebiscite for war in preference to surrender. Yet the leaders of



the nation during those anxious hours were confronted with a different choice. For six months their nerves had been uncowed by all the clamour from Germany. They had stood firm, ready, as their speedy mobilization against German threat in the previous May had proved, to fight in defence of their frontiers. All the bludgeoning, all the threats, had been of no avail to shake them. They believed that Czecho-Slovakia could hold a German assault until aid came from their allies in Paris, Moscow, and perhaps London. Such determination required courage enough, for her statesmen knew that Bohemia must be ready to make herself a second Flanders. All this they were prepared to do. But in the final crisis they were robbed of even this choice. There was no chance left of war; instant death for millions of her people was the only alternative offered. For suddenly, in the space of a few hours, instead of the German Reich as her opponent, little Czecho-Slovakia was compassed about with a great confederation of enemies. Germany, Hungary, Poland, Italy, all announced their determination to join in her dismemberment. Paris announced that no aid would come from France. In the same hour that her friends deserted her enemies multiplied. More, her friends dictated the ultimatum which her enemies had never been able to deliver. Czecho-Slovakia, ready for war, unready for suicide, was compelled to submit. That day the British and French Governments had extorted at the pistol-point the hectoring terms pronounced at Berchtesgaden. Czecho-Slovakia was finished. The "fortress built by God" was in the hands of Hitler.

There was a strange aftermath to that morning of submission, unaccountable to this day. Czecho-Slovakia's death-warrant was conveyed from London to Godesberg, where Herr Hitler had come "half-way" to meet the ageing British Premier. To Mr Chamberlain's astonishment more was demanded. And, to the amazement of the world, Mr Chamberlain was apparently prepared to resist; having approved the murder, he was grumbling

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about the details of its execution. He returned to London in a sombre mood, and a presentiment swept through France and Britain that the two countries might yet be called upon to fight in defence of the nation whose fortresses they had already agreed to yield. Gas-masks were distributed to the British public. Trenches were dug in London's parks. The Czech Army mobilized. And Sir Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to the Government and chief personal adviser to the Premier, was dispatched to Berlin to interview Hitler. The Fuehrer would not listen to the emissary of the British Premier. "I shall," he shouted, "tear the Czechs into little pieces. They must be smashed, smashed, smashed." Sir Horace returned to London. Hitler announced that, unless the Godesberg terms were accepted in forty-eight hours' time, Germany would march.

That night Mr Chamberlain came to the microphone. The British people hoped that he would divulge the secret of this strange affair in which the victor demanded war after his terms had been accepted, while the vanquished prepared for battle after they had surrendered their post. The hope was dashed. Mr Chamberlain referred to the "quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing." He argued that the terms already offered by Britain and France had given Germany "the substance of what she wanted." For the rest he said that Britain was not "in all circumstances ready to go to war on account of Czecho-Slovakia," and that Sudetenland was the last of Germany's territorial ambitions in Europe. Next morning came the news that the British Fleet was mobilized, and that night in the House of Commons a message was passed up to the Premier announcing that Hitler had agreed to a conference at Munich the next day, at which Germany, Italy, Britain, and France should meet to finish the affair. At that conference a treaty was signed in terms uncannily similar to those which Lord Runciman in his foresight had suggested more than a fortnight before. It would

be confusing to list its details. It represented a compromise, a settlement more exacting than the terms which Hitler had required at Berchtesgaden, less exacting than those which he had actually secured six weeks later. With the main business ended and with the *Diktat* pronounced to the Czech representatives who waited in the anteroom outside (in contrast to Versailles, where the vanquished were at least allowed into the main hall to hear their fate), Mr Chamberlain drew Herr Hitler aside. He asked for his signature on a document which stated that "we regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Convention as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again."

From that precise moment major war in Europe was probably inevitable. A main physical bulwark between Hitler and his dream of empire was broken and delivered into his hands. In the face of all mankind France had been compelled to dishonour her pledge, and a British Prime Minister had been forced to go to Germany and accept the master's behest. By their craven withdrawals Hitler had been convinced that Britain and France would never risk war except in defence of their own territories. By Mr Chamberlain's precious document he certainly understood that Britain had abdicated from Eastern Europe. By the exclusion of Russia from the conference of four the link was severed, perhaps for ever, between Moscow and Paris. At one stroke and almost without a shot Hitler had achieved a supremacy greater than Bismarck's. An isolated England, an isolated Russia, a humiliated France, a jubilant and friendly Italy, a triumphant Germany, and an Eastern Europe laid wide open as far as his imperial eye could scan—such were the prizes which he had carried back with him from Munich to Berchtesgaden. Only a Bismarck could have withstood the temptation. Hitler, with six previous years of victory behind him, could never now be restrained from the course of world conquest. Never

## BEQUEST FROM PRAGUE

would he pay heed again to the covenants and pledges of other great nations. Had he not seen them all grovel and obey?

After Munich, therefore, Europe was destined for war. But delusion was not ended. Mr Chamberlain stepped from his aeroplane at Heston, waved in his hand a scrap of paper, saying that he had achieved "peace in our time." He drove to Buckingham Palace amid cheering crowds, proclaimed that he had brought "peace with honour," and, while Czechs in that far-away country of which he knew nothing packed up their goods and raced for security from the Gestapo, he bade the people of London go home and sleep safely in their beds. In the House of Commons a few days later others joined him in the revelry round the corpse of Czecho-Slovakia. Sir John Simon described the surrender of Sudetenland as an "act of justice." Sir Thomas Inskip acclaimed this "negotiated peace," asserting proudly that the British guarantee was already in force. Sir Samuel Hoare pronounced the new state "as safe as Switzerland." Mr Chamberlain believed Czecho-Slovakia would obtain "a greater security than she had ever enjoyed in the past." Some protested, often with great eloquence. They were the "war-mongers," the men who "fouled their own nest." Yet on that evening when London lost its senses, when a British Prime Minister thought it honourable to have bought immunity for ourselves by the barter of a brave, free people, one epitaph was spoken which must surely have struck shame into the night of intoxication. A broadcast came through from Prague. "We bequeath our sorrows," it said, "to the French and British peoples."

## CHAPTER XVI

### BISMARCK THE LITTLE

The allies, and Great Britain amongst the rest (and perhaps amongst the foremost), have been miserably deluded by this fundamental error: that it was in our power to make peace with this monster of a state, whenever we chose to forget the crimes that made it great, and the designs that made it formidable.

EDMUND BURKE, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*

THE master of Bohemia is the master of Europe. This was Bismarck's precept, and in January 1939 Adolf Hitler, devout disciple of Bismarck, who had watched this bastion collapse before the threat of a weapon which he brandished but did not need to employ, must surely have seen a great avenue of conquest stretching beyond even his ambitious gaze. Nothing could stop him now. The only debate which possessed his mind concerned the exact time and sequence of the various items in his schedule of victory. Solid prudence dictated that before making any decisive challenge to the old Powers he had routed at Munich he should first grasp the wealth of the Balkans by the exercise of the same political daring and skill which had reaped so much for him in the past. He had good reason to believe that no interference would come from the west. After Munich Mr Chamberlain had spoken of the "dominating position" which Germany must naturally occupy in that area. M. Bonnet on behalf of France had stated, according to Ribbentrop's allegation, that "the attitude of France towards Eastern European problems had undergone a radical change since Munich." The German Press spoke quite openly in similar terms. "The Berlin Axis," said the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, "has re-established natural conditions in the Danube basin. No other agency could do that, especially since the Danube

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is no longer the focus of the Russian, Turkish, and Habsburg aspirations." Immediately those "natural conditions" involved the incorporation of Hungary within the Anti-Comintern Pact, and the spread of German propaganda throughout every Balkan state. Next two kindred problems of slightly larger dimensions required solution. Hitler wanted, first, control over the Baltic states, and partly with this aim in the last weeks of 1938 he had made public his intention to equip a bigger navy. Secondly, there was the issue of Poland. Hitler himself can hardly have believed that this would present any great difficulty. He had devoured his enemies the Czechs. Surely he could subdue Poland to his will with far greater ease. She had never possessed the tight alliance with France which Czecho-Slovakia had held. Since 1934 she had been willing to accommodate her policy to the desire, if not the dictation, of Berlin. In September 1938 she had played jackal to the Nazi lion in the mastication of the Czechs. No danger should arise, therefore, in her reduction from the place of dependent ally to pledged vassal. And with these two items marked off the slate, with the Baltic seaboard under his command, with Poland shackled by the same chain which was soon to bind the Balkans, Hitler would be in a position to consider the ultimate choice which in *Mein Kampf* he had left clumsily obscure. Would it then be westward in the track of Bismarck and the Kaiser, or eastward along the path which Ludendorff had blazed? He was beckoned most, perhaps, by the fat lands of the Ukraine; while he had studied the history books of Bismarck, he had heard the other story from Ludendorff's own lips. Along that eastern road the footprints of a German army were still warm in the snow.

This was his hope for the future, but immediately he must consult with his ally. Italy must continue her major rôle of discomfiting France. She might even be needed to play a minor military rôle as the plan progressed. On the 6th of March, therefore, Herr von Ribbentrop

was sent to consult with Count Ciano at Milan. A military alliance was signed, but, according to Count Ciano, no early military adventure of any consequence was contemplated. It was agreed that the maximum military strength of the two Powers would be attained in three years' time. The deal was made on the understanding that no question would be raised "which would be likely to stir up further polemics until the time period referred to had elapsed." The stage was set for three years more of armistice, which the conspirators against civilization would use to plant their dynamite, sharpen their knives, and perfect their scheming in readiness for the day when Adolf Hitler would be crowned monarch of Western Christendom.

Seven days after that agreement was made President Hácha, leader of the Czecho-Slovakian state truncated at Munich, was summoned to Berlin. He was presented with a document demanding his signature. Failure to sign would ensure that Hitler's bombing fleet would leave not one stone standing upon another in the cowering city of Prague. After hours of threat, with Hitler literally chasing him round the table, with doctors standing by to give him injections to keep him on his feet, Hácha bowed. Hitler's armies of invasion marched. And while Hitler himself walked as conqueror up the steps of the Hradcalny Palace in the Czecho-Slovakian capital a few brave shouts of freedom were all the protest which came from the people who had had their hands tied behind their backs at Munich. Hácha had been compelled to sign away the remnant of freedom which Mr Chamberlain's guarantee had been supposed to guard.

Hitler, it is clear, regarded this seizure as no more than a small incident, the effects of which would be restricted to the eastern domain which Munich had bestowed upon him. The testimony of Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, bears out this view; he states that Hitler was astonished at the indignation aroused by the *coup* in the Western democracies. Equally, it is hardly conceivable that Herr von

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Ribbentrop did not mention the matter to Count Ciano at Milan; it would surely have been the height of folly to strain the Axis by "stirring up polemics" on an issue on which Italy was never even forewarned. Italy, too, must therefore have regarded the seizure of Prague as a minor diplomatic event. Finally there is a statement (quite possibly a lie) by Field-Marshal Goering dismissing the matter as being of such small moment that he was never even informed. Altogether it appears that a misunderstanding must have occurred at Munich. It arose not so much because Mr Chamberlain had trusted Herr Hitler as because Hitler had trusted Mr Chamberlain. Hitler believed that the east belonged to him by right of the Munich surrender. He had seized Prague partly for loot, partly on the advice of his generals, who understood the strategic significance of possessing a long wedge driven eastward, partly because he knew what fierce political pressure could be exerted on neighbouring states by such possession. After seeing his Western adversaries in the flesh around his own table in Munich he could not believe that they would ever muster the courage to challenge him until he had chosen his hour to challenge them. Yet the manner of this seizure upset his whole scheme. He strode on unaware, hauling behind him a whole continent to war.

## II

Poland was listed as the next victim in the calendar of conquest without battle. It was here that the impact of events in Czecho-Slovakia had its first reaction in upsetting Hitler's scheme. A sudden switch was made in the tortuous foreign policy of Colonel Beck, Foreign Minister of Poland. It altered the complexion of the whole of Eastern Europe.

Marshal Pilsudski had laid the foundation of Poland's policy in the Hitler period by his treaty with Germany in 1934. He had the skill to balance on the fence between



a French and German alliance. It was neither an edifying nor a safe posture, for the time would certainly come when Germany would revive her claim for Danzig and the Polish Corridor. And with the passing of Pilsudski the post was inherited by men who had all his taste for intrigue, but not half his cunning. Colonel Beck had a task which would have taxed a trapeze artist. He lurched from side to side.

In January 1939 the list was definitely pro-German, although Colonel Beck had a plan as grandiose in regard to his means as Hitler's own. He hoped to construct a neutral *bloc* composed of Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Rumania, possibly under Italy's patronage. To secure this end one chief means had to be achieved—a common frontier between Hungary and Poland. At the moment the two countries were divided by the strip of territory, known as Ruthenia, at the eastern tip of Czecho-Slovakia. Already at Munich Colonel Beck had appealed to Hitler to allow this territory to be seized by Hungary. The appeal was rejected. Hitler had hopes of using the Ruthenian people as a jumping-off ground for his Ukrainian nationalist movement, which he trusted would enable him to stir up discontent in the Ukraine and perhaps among the Ukrainians in Poland itself. Yet, despite this first setback, Colonel Beck persisted. Italy supported him. Hungary's appetite was naturally enlisted. Beck's hopes were high. He pictured his neutral *bloc* withstanding the worst ravages of Pan-Germanism by his own cunning, but refusing to make any solid agreement with the Western Powers. And his reason for the refusal to commit Poland finally to France is not hard to find. France was an ally of Russia, and Beck hated Bolshevism like the plague. He was a representative of the Polish landowners and military caste. His chief task was, not to preserve Poland, but to preserve them. It was an assignment which sent him peering into all the dirtier corners of the diplomatic labyrinth. Many years before Thomas Masaryk had said, "Without a

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free Poland, Czecho-Slovakia cannot go free; without a free Czecho-Slovakia, Poland will lose its independence." Colonel Beck did not understand such idealistic sentiment. He was a realist, ready to deal with Germany one day and France the next, trusting to his own skill to persuade Hitler to take his meals off some one else's table and willing, as at the time of Munich, to pick up a few crumbs for himself.

In January 1939 Colonel Beck was watching every chance. Hitler seemed friendly, and Beck was eager to profit from the opportunity. On the 25th of January Herr von Ribbentrop made a visit to Warsaw. Everything was done to ensure its success, and at the end of the talks Beck must have believed that he was making good progress. A *communiqué* was issued saying that the visit had once again shown

that collaboration between Poland and the Reich, which has stood the test of the last five years, has not only contributed towards a continual improvement of Polish-German relations, but has become in the new situation a valuable contribution towards present appeasement in Europe.

On what basis this happy prophecy was made the world does not yet certainly know. It is believed, however, that a rough arrangement was reached. Germany was to mitigate her Ukrainian campaign in order to prevent trouble among the Polish minorities. She was to allow Poland to have her common frontier with Hungary. In return Poland was not to make any pact with the Western Powers. Three days after Ribbentrop had left Warsaw Hitler spoke in the Reichstag on the fifth anniversary of the conclusion of the non-aggression treaty with Poland. He paid great tribute to Marshal Pilsudski, praised the Poles, and spoke in rich terms of the contribution which the German-Polish pact had made to European peace. Two months later he seized Prague, and Poland gained her part of the bargain—the common frontier with Hungary. A few days later again—on the

21st of March—Herr von Ribbentrop called the Polish Ambassador to him in Berlin, and proposed that negotiations should immediately start between the two Governments with the purpose of finding a solution to the problem of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. Germany wanted the complete cession of Danzig and a road across the corridor. Colonel Beck was alarmed. He lurched again. Defensive measures were taken on the frontier. A reply was sent back to Germany proposing certain concessions, but objecting to any transference of territory.

At last, like all the other too-clever simpletons, Poland's leaders were discovering that something more than diplomatic intrigue was needed to stay the march of Nazidom. Thomas Masaryk was right after all. Poland's fate, like that of so many other nations, was inextricably tied up with the fate of Czecho-Slovakia, which she had joined to plunder. Hastily, nervously, Colonel Beck prepared to make that alliance with the west which two months earlier he had abjured. But here we must leave the scene in Poland. Away in London the British Prime Minister and all his Cabinet were doing somersaults and handsprings along the front bench of the House of Commons in a manner which made Colonel Beck look a very mean performer.

Mr Chamberlain was greatly disturbed by the seizure of Prague. A few days before it occurred a special sunshine bulletin had been issued from Government quarters, rejoicing over the relaxed tension which appeared in the affairs of Europe. Sir Samuel Hoare improved the occasion by rushing in with far from angelic tread to speak of the coming of the Golden Age. It was naturally a somewhat disconcerted administration which, four days later, confronted the British House of Commons while Hitler was still parading in Prague. Mr Chamberlain stated that Czecho-Slovakia had unhappily "become disintegrated." "I am bound to say," he said, "that I cannot believe that anything of the kind which has now taken place was contemplated by any of the signatories

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to the Munich Agreement at the time of its signature." This mild rebuke was greeted with Opposition laughter, but the Premier stood firm. He "bitterly regretted" what happened, but made it plain that the Government would not be "deflected from its course." Sir John Simon was even more specific. "It was really essential," he said, "that we should not enter into an extensive, general, undefined commitment with the result, to a large extent, that our foreign policy would depend, not on this country, this Parliament, and the electors, but on a lot of foreign Governments." So far, therefore, Hitler had been proved correct in his estimate of British foreign policy and the men who controlled it. It was safe for him to continue his eastward march, assured that Britain, and with her France, had abdicated from any interest in that area. Three days later Mr Chamberlain addressed his constituents in Birmingham. A sterner tone crept into his voice. Germany's act was roundly denounced. It posed the issue (already hinted in *Mein Kampf*) whether Nazi-ism was really intent on securing the domination of Europe. Yet Mr Chamberlain was still cautious. "I am not prepared," he said, "to engage this country by new unspecified commitments under conditions which cannot now be foreseen."

That speech was delivered on the 17th of March. Between that day and the 31st of March a revolution occurred in British policy as momentous as any in its history. A great revolt took place in the mind of the British people against the policy of Munich. They began to believe that something more solid than words from the Fuehrer must be discovered to bolster the peace of Europe. They clamoured for the resurrection of the plan of collective security, long since dead and buried with its funeral orations reverently chanted by the three gravediggers Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare, and Mr Chamberlain himself. The Cabinet yielded before the pressure. Their eyes roamed over Europe in search of allies. An offer had come from the Soviet Union

proposing a conference at Bucharest at which all interested and peaceful Powers might meet to concert measures of defence. That proposition was blandly and almost indignantly spurned. Instead, the British Government undertook perhaps the most amazing responsibility which any administration in this country has ever shouldered. On the 31st of March Mr Chamberlain announced that "in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all the support in their power."

This was the negation of collective security. It gave to one Power the right to judge the issue of war and peace, which under the Covenant of the League all committed nations were to concert together. It guaranteed British military aid in a theatre where none could discover how it could be given. Mr Lloyd George inquired whether the General Staff had approved the guarantee; no answer was supplied. The British House of Commons approved. But in Berlin and Moscow the British pronouncement must have been received with startled incredulity. Britain, which had refused to uphold the territorial integrity of China, Spain, Abyssinia, and Czecho-Slovakia, had accepted responsibility for the maintenance of a frontier which she could never even reach, much less defend. She had preferred, moreover, to assume this liability before even seeking the asset which a Russian alliance was able to offer. Berlin was amazed. Hitler believed that Britain was bluffing; he continued to press his demands on Poland. And in Moscow more subtle calculations were undertaken. Stalin too must have regarded the pledge as plain bluff; and he discovered soon that when a British mission arrived in Moscow to discuss plans for an Anglo-Soviet alliance the previous guarantee to Poland enabled Warsaw to dictate the terms on which she would be saved from any

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Nazi assault. If there was any danger of drowning Colonel Beck was able to decide that he would be picked up by a British rather than a Russian lifeboat. Stalin, therefore, saw the spectre of German troops marching across Poland with his own armies left to meet the full blast while Britain and France gave only a formal promise of aid. He decided to listen to what Britain and France had to say, and meanwhile to look for some alternative means of saving, if not Europe, at least the Soviet Union, from Nazi aggression. He was ready to talk with the Germans.

By Britain's Polish pledge the stage was set finally for European war. After Munich it was probably inevitable, for such impetus had been given to Hitler's ambition that he could never again constrain it. The Polish pledge, however, fixed the time and place. Poland was encouraged to resist the exorbitant demands of the Reich, which would have stripped her of national independence. Yet such a guarantee was not formidable enough to check the Reich from presenting those demands with even greater force. Hitler still believed that nothing had occurred to disturb his agenda of conquest, settled after Munich. And if he had any doubts on that score he now had a trump up his sleeve in the form of a possible pact with Russia. A ramshackle form of selective, rather than collective, security had been instituted, strong enough to defeat the Reich in war, insufficient to dissuade the Reich from embarking on a war. It needed a Solomon at such a late hour to construct an effective peace alliance. Instead, the task was undertaken by the men who had the blood of Abyssinia, Spain, and Czecho-Slovakia on their hands.

But if there were blunders in London there were more blunders in Berlin. German diplomacy had constructed a huge system of blackmail. Japan in the Far East could divert the attention of the British Government, and perhaps part of the strength of the British Navy, from European affairs. Italy in the Mediterranean could be relied upon to keep France equally diverted. And

Germany herself, by steady pressure in the east, might at last succeed in breaking Polish nerves. Such a confederation under Germany's direction, with so many triumphs already in its record, was not something to be lightly jeopardized. It was not an infallible recipe. Conceivably, if London and Paris were allowed to make a firm agreement with Moscow, other states, even in the German province of South-eastern Europe, would swing towards the superior alignment. That was certainly a danger, but it was not yet imminent. It postulated for its final achievement a total change of heart and perhaps of Government in England, a similar conversion in France, and a willingness on the part of Colonel Beck to accept aid from Russia, with all its awkward consequences for his Polish landowners. These were considerable hypotheses, and the Nazis would have been wise to retain their old alliances until they were certain of something solid in exchange, and to rely for the achievement of fresh "bloodless" victories on those motives in the minds of Mr Chamberlain and M. Daladier which had made them prefer, as the better of two bad alternatives, the aggrandisement of Nazi-ism in peace rather than its overthrow in war. Germany and Italy were in no position yet to make the decisive challenge for world power. Such had been the agreement between the two countries at Milan in March. But it was the misfortune of Nazi Germany that at the critical moment the direction of these matters was falling more and more into the hands of Herr von Ribbentrop, whom, according to Sir Nevile Henderson, Hitler regarded as a second Bismarck. In fact, he bears as little resemblance to the great founder of German hegemony in Europe as Napoleon III did to the first Emperor of France. He should be dubbed more accurately Bismarck the Little.

Herr von Ribbentrop had read *Mein Kampf* with as much benefit as its general illiteracy and his own meagre talents would allow. He modelled his diplomacy on the analysis of Bismarck's policy contained in that work.

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Bismarck recommended (1) the playing off of Italian ambitions against France, (2) no quarrel with England, and (3) security in the east before engaging in war in the west. The first aim was achieved by his disciple; Italy played her part to perfection. For the second, in place of the order that Britain *must* not be fought, Herr von Ribbentrop substituted the crude assertion that Britain *will* not fight. And in the third place he was left still seeking to patch up security in the east only *after* instead of *before* he was committed to war in the west. Thus Herr von Ribbentrop, whose mental capacities were never rated higher than his manners, caricatured the master diplomacy of Bismarck.

The climax to the tragedy came swiftly in August. Guns and troops were imported into the Free City of Danzig, and incidents were provoked on the Polish frontier. Poland was calm, her rulers reticent in giving any excuse for Nazi action. Hitler was goaded on by the knowledge that a campaign could not be fought in a full Polish winter and the hope that the Russian agreement produced with such suddenness that it startled even his Italian allies, would break the Anglo-French-Polish alliance. At his elbow always stood Herr von Ribbentrop, who, in the words of Sir Nevile Henderson, "apparently advised him up to the last moment that Britain would not fight." He, more than any man perhaps, was responsible for setting the spark to the dynamite, yet we must not be too severe in our judgment. Perhaps he believed that Sir Samuel Hoare would discover some congenial spirit in France and produce a new Laval Plan to save peace by giving half Poland to the aggressor. Perhaps he thought Sir John Simon would come forward and announce that Poland, like Abyssinia, was not worth the life of one British soldier. Perhaps even Mr Chamberlain himself would be prepared to deliver a German ultimatum in Warsaw as he had once done in Prague. We cannot tell. Only this fact is known: that Hitler ordered his troops across the Polish frontier, in defiance



of the agreement made with his ally in Rome, risking all on one throw, but still assured in his own belief that Britain and France would condone his latest conquest—if not before, at least after it had been garnered. Mr Chamberlain would recognize the facts as they existed. Had he not done so in Abyssinia? It was Mr Chamberlain who had said that if Britain deserted Abyssinia the generation responsible would be handed down to the obloquy of our children and our children's children, and who three years later had raised his glass in toast to the new Emperor of that murdered people. Hitler in Poland would ask no more.

Whatever the hope, it went unfulfilled. For the Government of England no longer resided in Mr Chamberlain's hands alone. A people so long deluded by the prospect of immunity for themselves discovered at last that Nazi-ism challenged the frontiers of elementary freedom. Wearily, but resolved, they turned to assume the sorrows which China and Abyssinia and Spain and Czecho-Slovakia had bequeathed. Deprived of choice, they were ready to expiate by the only means they could the twenty years of pride and pusillanimity which their rulers had displayed. No people ever went to war in such a mood. They did it, not for glory, not for adventure, not for imperial gain, but because they knew assured peace would only come again when men had shown the courage to defy the Nazi edict and break the Nazi sword. Yet their hope for the future will depend on the recognition that not one man alone had "shut the gates of mercy on mankind." If tragedy is not to recur guilt must be apportioned to those who nurtured Hitler in the first decade and magnified him in the second. The British people, as Mr Chamberlain said, are fighting evil things. They must be ready to fight them in peace as in war, in England as in Europe.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LUDENDORFF'S NIGHTMARE

IN the middle days of September 1938, when Mr Chamberlain was making his hectic journeys to Germany, when Mussolini was trumpeting his firm support of the Axis, when the eyes of the world were concentrated on events in Berlin, Prague, London, and Paris, a forlorn figure wandered almost unobserved through the corridors of Geneva. He was Maxim Litvinov, Foreign Commissar of the Soviet Union, the most astute and experienced diplomat in Europe. He had come to Geneva for the session of the League Assembly, a function which had once attracted Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries from every capital, together with the hopes of millions of humble men and women in every land. This was the palace raised in the image of President Wilson's dream. Here Aristide Briand had exerted all his rhetoric in the cause of European peace. Here Gustav Stresemann had sworn Germany's allegiance to the same standard. At this altar successive leading statesmen from Paris and London had once made their obeisance. More than fifty nations had seen in this institution the promise of a new world. Each had pledged their peoples to abide by its laws and to uphold its covenants, if need be, by force of arms. This structure had, indeed, been hailed as the single achievement of the sacrifice of 1914-18, the only guardian which could stand between the dead and the living and stay the plague. Yet in September 1938, in the European crisis greater than any which the world had known since the last gun was fired on the first 11th of November, not one great leader of the nations was to be found within miles of the hallowed precincts of Geneva other than Maxim Litvinov, ex-gaol-bird,

representative of the people who until four years previously had been barred altogether from the European family. He was left as the sole depository of the dreams of Wilson, the hopes of Briand, all the prodigious aspirations once embodied in the name of Geneva.

A considerable agenda, it is true, awaited discussion. There was a flicker of the old interminable protests from two victims of the aggression, China and Spain. Britain was to propose that the Assembly should recognize that the Covenant's automatic economic and military sanctions had become optional and discretionary for all League members. Delegates had even come prepared to partake in these academic debates. It is doubtful, however, whether the Geneva agenda was really the reason for their attendance. They came rather in the belief that Geneva would provide an excellent gallery from which they could watch the mighty tragedy being played at Berchtesgaden, Godesberg, and Munich. Against this attraction even M. Litvinov's acidulated comment in the wings could not gain a hearing. Certainly no attention was likely to be paid to the stuttering speech of two persons so anonymous as a couple of British Under-Secretaries, which was, in fact, all the representation which Britain could muster for the occasion. The whole ceremony passed off without affecting a single detail in the European situation. For all the influence which they had on the course of events the delegates might with equal profit have dressed themselves as Druids and performed their rites at Stonehenge.

Yet M. Litvinov did not altogether waste his time. His behaviour was impeccable. His country was pledged, like France, to defend the frontiers of Czecho-Slovakia, although under Czech advice it had been agreed that Russia's guarantee should only operate after the guarantee of France had been invoked. M. Litvinov used his position at Geneva to let the world understand that Russia was fully prepared to carry out her obligations in letter and spirit. This fact had been affirmed on the 11th

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of May, the 25th of August, and again on the 2nd of September. On the 11th of September he had suggested that Britain, France, and Russia should make a joint *démarche* in Berlin under the Covenant of the League on behalf of the Czechs. The idea had been rejected, but M. Litvinov was persistent. He urged immediate military talks between the guarantor Powers, and discussed with the Rumanian delegate at Geneva the passage of Russian troops through Rumanian territory. He advised his Government to threaten the denunciation of the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact if Poland continued to mass troops on the Czech border. And on the 21st of September he rose in his place in the Assembly Hall and reiterated Russia's pledge for all the world to hear. Russia, he said, had not presumed to advise the Czech Government in its dealings with the Sudeten Germans, since she regarded these matters as being solely a domestic affair of the Czecho-Slovak state. "Our military authorities," he concluded, "are ready to participate immediately in a conference with the military representatives of France and Czecho-Slovakia in order to determine what measures are required by the situation."

M. Litvinov's efforts were not greatly appreciated. He was not informed of the course of negotiations between Mr Chamberlain and Hitler, although occasionally the Soviet Ambassador in London was called to the Foreign Office to receive at first hand a recital of the events which had already been reported in the newspapers. On only one occasion was a direct approach made to him. That occurred just after Mr Chamberlain's return from Godesburg, when it seemed possible for one brief moment that Britain and France might be compelled to go to war in Czecho-Slovakia's defence. Earl De La Warr (one of the anonymous Under-Secretaries) had a long talk with the Soviet emissary, and M. Litvinov's assurances were altogether satisfactory. A *communiqué* was issued as a result in London which made it clear that Russia would stand solidly with Britain and France in

resisting the Godesburg ultimatum. If war came Britain and France would have Russia as a treasured ally. The next item of news, however, which reached M. Litvinov must have caused him considerable shock. He did not receive it through diplomatic channels, but on the radio and in the newspapers. And the news was that Britain and France were to meet next day at Munich with Germany and Italy to settle the affairs of Czecho-Slovakia. Russia was not invited. The door was slammed in her face. Neither Mr Chamberlain nor M. Daladier raised one word of objection. The ally of Tuesday had become the outcast of Thursday. At that M. Litvinov felt it was time he was going home. He packed his bags and hastened back to Moscow to confront the master of a hundred and eighty million people who sat in the Kremlin. M. Litvinov's temper was not improved by reading Mr Chamberlain's assertion in the House of Commons that Russia was not invited to Munich because Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini would not approve. Joseph Stalin's mood was no better. His nation had been treated as if it counted for nothing in the affairs of Europe.

No record exists of the subsequent discussion between the ruler of Russia and his Foreign Commissar, but it is not difficult to supply the deficiency. At its birth the Soviet Republic had been ringed about with a great assembly of enemies. A dozen nations had sent troops to Soviet soil with the aim of crushing the first Socialist state before it could stand squarely on its feet. The effort had failed, yet it was clear that no great breach had been made in the unanimous hate of capitalist Powers. Britain had treated the new nation like a leper. Japan had been encouraged to turn her depredations on the Asiatic mainland northward to Soviet borders. Hitler had been hailed by so many ruling statesmen in the west as a bulwark against Bolshevism. Soviet psychology had been conditioned by this universal enmity as surely as a child, bullied in its infancy, grows suspicious and wary in all its dealings in manhood. Under Stalin, indeed, this

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just fear was allowed to govern Soviet policy to the exclusion of many of the ideals which Bolshevism had championed in its youth. He built a huge war industry capable of defending Soviet frontiers, and watched always for the chance of splitting his enemies to win assured peace for the land of Socialism. With the rise of Hitler and the loss of Germany, the only friend whom Russia had been able to secure in Western Europe, the need became more insistent. As Germany went out of one door at Geneva, therefore, Russia came in at the other. She became the foremost champion of the theory that a great confederation of nations whose interest was peace might be able to overawe those others who were driving towards war. One by one the smaller nations were engulfed by aggression, despite the Soviet's consistent pledge to uphold their Covenant. Stalin was not inclined to draw much distinction between assassin and accomplice in these successive outrages. It occurred to him that rulers in Britain and France were more concerned about the maintenance of Fascism in Germany and Italy than the survival of democracy in Spain or Czecho-Slovakia. And when at last at Munich he saw the four Western Powers engaged in conference, with the Soviet Union ostentatiously excluded, he saw also that the Covenant of the League of Nations provided small protection for Russia. Two of these Munich Powers were in league with his enemy Japan. A third, Great Britain, appeared quite willing to see Japan rampaging towards Russia's frontier even if she did it over the trouserless legs of unoffending British citizens. The enemies of the Soviet Union appeared as firmly united in 1938 as they had been in 1918.

After Munich, therefore, Stalin was ready to adopt any new tactic within his main strategy of defending the Soviet Republic. He was still prepared to consider the chance of resurrecting the system of collective security, but he would need great assurances before he accepted it as a sure weapon for gaining peace. Moreover, Stalin,

despite the fact that his intellect and humanity were not half so wide as Lenin's, had profited by his study of Marx. He did not regard these wars which raged in the world from Shanghai to Gibraltar, affecting already five hundred million people, as local incidents. To him they were the opening campaigns in a second world war, in which the final issue might easily become the survival of the economic system which he and his predecessors had established over a sixth of the globe. If that were the real battle it appeared after Munich that every Great Power was ranged against him. All the decisions were taken in his absence. Paris and London preferred to treat with Berlin and Rome and Tokyo than ever to come within a thousand miles of Moscow. It was no remarkable conclusion, therefore, for Stalin to reach that if Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo talked without him they were conspiring against him. Plain prudence, not Asiatic cunning, must have suggested nothing else. His first aim after Munich, therefore, must have been to break this immense alliance. And he believed now that he could do it, not by lofty covenants, but by the barter of interests in the usual diplomatic market. If he had ever believed the professions of capitalist statesmen five years at Geneva had cured him. "Far be it from me," he said in his speech to the congress of the Communist party, "to moralize on the policy of non-intervention, to talk of treason, treachery, and so on. It would be naïve to preach morals to people who recognize no human morality. Politics is politics, as the old case-hardened *bourgeois* diplomats say. It must be remarked, however, that the big and dangerous game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them."

That speech was delivered on March 10, 1939. It indicated that if France were determined to withdraw behind her Maginot Line, disinteresting herself in Germany's aggression eastward, then Russia might seek her revenge by building, if she could, a Maginot Line of her

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own against the warring peoples of Europe. At what exact moment after that speech he made the decision to break finally with the Western Powers who were always so ready to break with him in a crisis is unknown. Ten days later he proposed a conference at Bucharest to concert measures of defence against Nazidom; it was rejected. Rather than accept his proposal, the Western Powers bestowed a gratuitous guarantee on Poland, a country which had always refused the offer to join the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact, and which had only recently joined the Nazi plunder against the Czechs. Stalin must have been dumbfounded by this act. He was already sceptical of the value of Britain's or France's word. How could he really believe that they were in earnest when they preferred a Polish to a Russian alliance? His suspicions were not allayed when on the 15th of April the British Government proposed to him that the Soviet Government should bestow a unilateral guarantee on Poland and Rumania. Stalin saw what he took to be a trap. If Britain, France, and Russia were all engaged to these countries, while only Russia was able to give material aid, it did not require any great powers of imagination to picture a war in which Russia bore the brunt of the Nazi assault while Britain and France stood aside at that safe distance which strategy, in any case, was bound to dictate. Stalin, therefore, replied two days later with a suggestion for a triple defensive alliance of France, Britain, and the U.S.S.R., a military convention, and a guarantee to all states from the Baltic to the Black Sea. No answer was returned for three weeks. Instead came the news that the British Ambassador in Berlin, previously withdrawn, had surprisingly returned, while, if the *Times* newspaper were ever read in the Kremlin, Stalin was informed that Britain was opposed to dividing Europe into two *blocs*. Every circumstance of the past and present record of the British Government seemed to point to the fact that the pledge to Poland was a fake. Stalin believed that at any moment the British Government



might settle with Berlin exactly as they had done at Munich. He knew that such an agreement could only injure the interests of the Soviet Union, and began to realize that he could beat Mr Chamberlain at his own game. On the 3rd of May M. Litvinov, who might not be expected to be popular in Germany, was relieved of his post. Russia stood ready to sign with Berlin or London, according to which Power offered the better terms. In the subsequent three months of haggling Britain refused to send Lord Halifax to Moscow, sent instead a man described in successive speeches by Lloyd George as a third-, a fourth-, and a fifth-rate Foreign Office clerk; refused to send a full military mission, sent instead by a roundabout sea journey a collection of secondary military figures. At the same time Britain showed little interest in Russia's fear of attack through the Baltic states, while she was quite willing to let the Poles dictate that no Russian troops should be allowed on Polish soil. If he signed with London there was the possibility that war might not break out owing to the superior power of the peace alliance; but against that chance he had always the presiding fear that Britain might return to the Munich policy and leave him alone to confront ravenous Nazidom. Against that not very inviting proposition Germany offered something far better. It is not known precisely what she did offer. But it is at least certain that Stalin understood the proposition much better than the peripatetic Ribbentrop, who made it. Ribbentrop saw an easy device for securing quick triumph over Poland. Stalin seized a weapon to reverse the whole engine of history which in the past few years had seemed directed to secure the destruction of his nation. On the 23rd of August he signed the Russo-German Pact.

The triumph which he scored in subsequent days still staggers the imagination. By the same stroke Japan was struck back reeling into the corner, Italy was reduced to injured silence, Fascist Spain stuttered her incredulity;

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in a word, the great anti-Bolshevik confederation was cracked and broken, perhaps beyond repair. Nazi Germany, it is true, was allowed her part of the bargain. She was enabled to plunder Poland. Yet as the prize fell into her grasp Russian troops marched and snatched more than half of it from her. Nazi-ism awoke one morning to discover that a new power stood athwart her path to the Balkans. No more could she dream of unhindered domination to the Black Sea and perhaps to the Bosphorus. And there was worse to come. The Baltic was once a German ocean; to affirm this fact less than a year before Hitler had re-equipped his navy and wrenched Memel from the Lithuanians. Now within a few days each Baltic Province dropped like a ripe plum into Stalin's lap; German citizens had to pack their bags and learn how modest were the Fuehrer's ideas of *Lebensraum*. None escaped the shattering impact of Stalin's blow. Without a war he became a potentate in the Balkans; without a navy he had gained an ocean. Britain's insults were avenged. Munich was exposed as the frolic of a collection of dwarfs. And as Soviet troops retraced the ground where Ludendorff's troops had once trod, as the diplomats again assembled at Brest-Litovsk to fix another partition, it was revealed that the force which for twenty years Western statesmen had affected to deride would henceforth play a full part in any final reckoning.

There is, however, a strange, unfinished sequel to the story. Not since 1918 had Moscow played so formidable a rôle. In those earlier days the resounding appeal issued by Lenin and Trotsky had had tremendous reverberations in every western city. It was an idea which struck terror into every ruling class, raised in some cases open battles in the streets, and was cherished in countless working homes as an augury of a new day even after revolt had been drenched in blood. Throughout all these post-War years the inspiration has persisted. Brutal and desperate deeds were certainly done in the new state, but with it all

one fact was unassailable. In the Soviet Union the old economic system which decreed that the mass of the community should carry on its back a great weight of privilege and private ownership had been overturned; in its place, whatever the imperfections, each man had established title to the fruits of his own labours. This was the fact that presented a permanent challenge to the rest of the world, and which gave to the Soviet Union its allegiance in Durham and South Wales, the Red belt of Paris, Hamburg and Berlin, New York and San Francisco, all those other places where the cleavage between rich and poor stood out vulgar and stark. Rich men had jeered that the thing could not be done; inconsistently they had made huge efforts to ensure that it was not done. Soviet Russia had been fought, ostracized, derided, slandered. And in the face of it all the thing was achieved. Russia's economic life was shaped to a pattern totally different from any that the world had ever seen, and, despite all the jeers and threats, it stood the test. For, while in every other land economic life was shattered by the slump, Russia alone stood clear. She continued to increase the wealth of her people without interruption, for she alone had abolished the distinction between master and man. Yet in the midst of this triumph she suffered one defeat. Capitalism exacted one last tribute from the Russian people. It dictated that if the Soviet Union was to survive it must be capable of defence against a ring of enemies. It was necessary that Soviet economy should be twisted to build a huge war machine, and it was not surprising if in the process her rulers lost something of that first internationalist faith, turning to find safety in the same precautionary devices that every capitalist state employs. Stalin was determined to seize his Gibaltars and his Singapores. Because he was a lesser man than Lenin, he did not understand that they would be dearly bought if they involved the forfeit of some great part of the allegiance which the Soviet Union had gained in other countries. He was ready to employ lies and deceit

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in pursuit of his aims. Again because he was a lesser man than Lenin, he did not recall that the Soviet Union's strength in all her diplomatic dealings resided in her open diplomacy and her unmasking of deceit.

Thus, with the Baltic states already in his grip, he turned on Finland. It was true that Leningrad was strategically exposed to attack from across the Finnish border; true that any assault on the Soviet Union might find its most convenient road through the Gulf of Finland and across Finnish territory. It was not true that Finland was a Fascist state; nor was it true, as Stalin found to his cost, that the Finnish people were eager to rise in revolt against the oppressors whom they had only recently voted to office. Stalin did not know or care. He flung his soldiers against ice and snow and forest and the fine fury of a stalwart, independent people. The man who had just gained the biggest diplomatic triumph of modern times perpetrated one of the most prodigious blunders of history. He had stooped to the methods of the imperialism which it was the historic mission of his class to overthrow. They will do it despite blunders and crimes by their leaders.

A final note of farce was sounded above Europe's plunge to Armageddon. The scene was Geneva, where so many solemn oaths had been sworn, and so many rich hopes founded. From far and near, from South America and Scandinavia, from the Balkans to the Baltic, from all the big chancelleries of Europe, delegates assembled beside the Swiss lake. No one had been near the place for twelve months or more. But now the corridors were packed, business moved fast, and a chatter of excitement buzzed through the lobbies. At last the great moment came. Tender, devoted hands reached up and lifted down the Covenant of the League of Nations from the dusty cupboard in which M. Litvinov had regretfully placed it on that drab September afternoon in 1938. Was this repentance for the past? Were Abyssinia, Spain, and

Czecho-Slovakia to be given some balm for their sorrows? China had fought with great valour for seven years against the invader, and she was still fighting on; was she to be succoured at this eleventh hour? Albania's case still figured on the agenda; was Rome to be challenged? Not so. It was Finland which had succeeded in summoning life from the tomb, for Finland alone had the advantage of being invaded by a Bolshevik instead of a Fascist state. Against such an outrage Britain's voice was heard loud and clear. Her delegate had stalled Abyssinia's plea for seven months, Spain's plea for three years, China's plea for almost a decade. Now her representative required an answer from Moscow in twenty-four hours. Geneva, scene of so many of the infamies which have condemned mankind to a second slaughter, scene of that last despairing effort of M. Litvinov to forestall the disaster, had never witnessed such festivity:

As hags hold Sabbaths, less from joy than spite,  
 So these their merry, miserable night.  
 Still round and round the ghosts of beauty glide  
 And haunt the places where their honour died.

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